

TRUMP

by Michael Tomasky

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FALL BOOKS ISSUE

Oliver Sacks: URGE

Timothy Snyder: HITLER

Diane Johnson: 'WATCHMAN'

Marilynne Robinson: *FEAR*

■ ■ ■



**Jed Perl:
The Perils of
Painting**

**Jessica Mathews:
What Foreign Policy for the US?**

Lorrie Moore: 'True Detective'

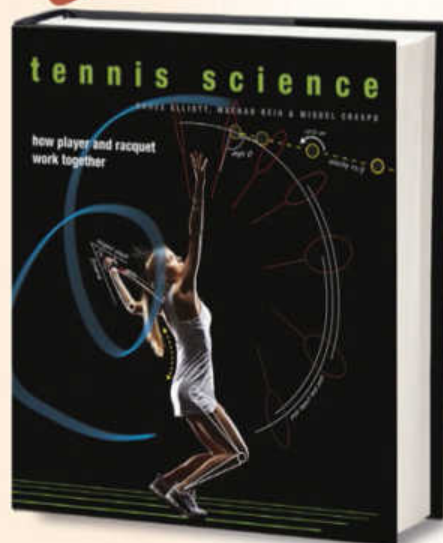
The ISIS Slavery Manual

Jewish Terrorism!

**James Surowiecki on
Joseph Stiglitz**

Fall Books

From CHICAGO



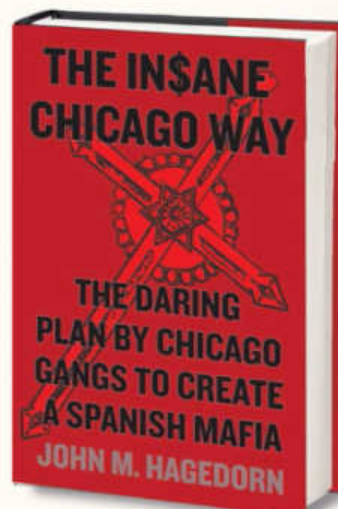
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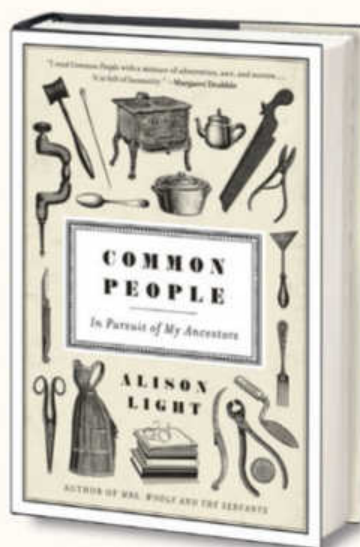
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Alison Light

"By turns mesmeric and deeply moving; a poetic excavation of the very meaning of history."—*Daily Telegraph*

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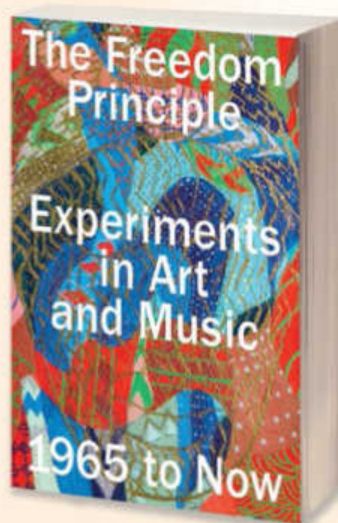
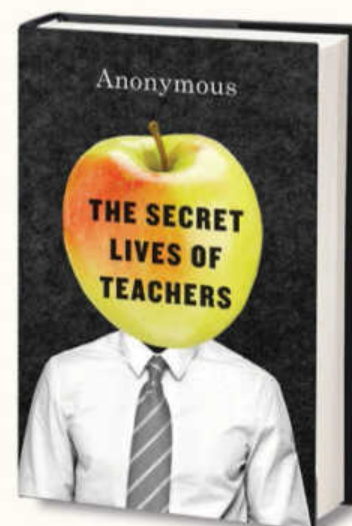


THE SECRET LIVES OF TEACHERS

Anonymous

The author of this book teaches at a high school in New York City. Freed by anonymity, he is able to tell a frank story about the universal conditions, anxieties, foibles, generosity, hopes, and complaints that comprise every teacher's life. The results are sometimes funny, sometimes scandalous, but always recognizable to anyone who has ever walked into a classroom.

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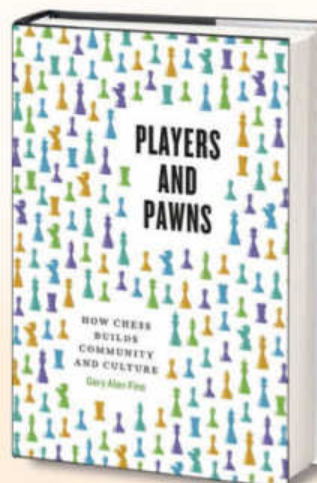
Edited by Naomi Beckwith and Dieter Roelstraete

This catalog accompanies a Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago show on African American experimental art and music of the past fifty years, with a special focus on the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

"Astounding. . . Fuses the history of music and the history of art into a single, more complete narrative, and makes it look easy."—*Guardian*, on the exhibition

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Gary Alan Fine

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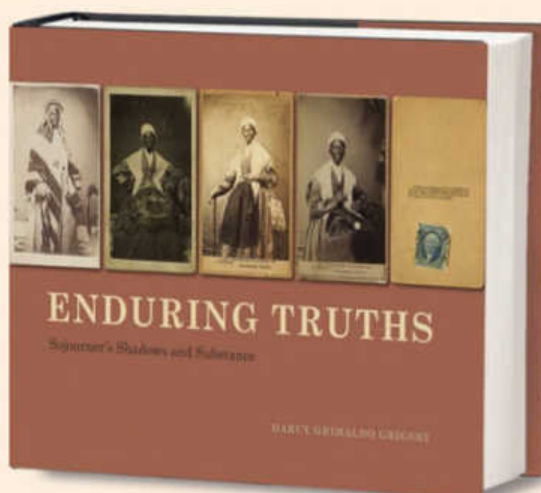
ENDURING TRUTHS

Sojourner's Shadows and Substance

Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

"Grigsby convincingly demonstrates how Sojourner Truth's shrewd engagement with the new medium of photography, in tandem with her deliberate efforts to secure legal and monetary control over her portraits, became a platform for the assertion of a former slave's claims to personhood and self-possession."—Agnes Lugo-Ortiz, coeditor of *Slave Portraiture in the Atlantic World*

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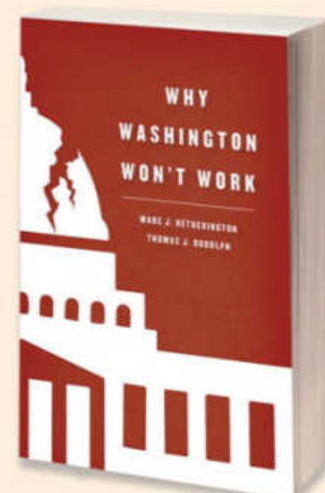
WHY WASHINGTON WON'T WORK

Polarization, Political Trust, and the Governing Crisis

Marc J. Hetherington and Thomas J. Rudolph

"This is a marvelous book. Hetherington and Rudolph have written a compelling and smoothly accessible work that reveals more about the troubled condition of American politics than any presidential campaign tome."—David Maraniss, author of *First in His Class*

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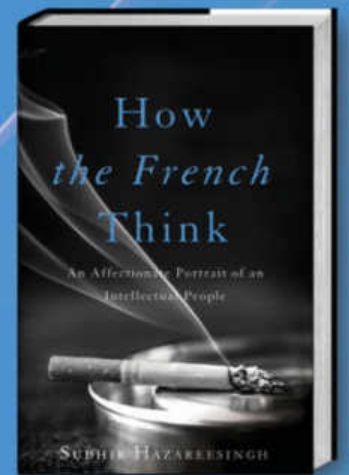
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How *the* French Think

An Affectionate Portrait
of an Intellectual People
By Sudhir Hazareesingh

“It is unusual to laugh aloud when reading a history of ideas, but I did so more than once while reading *How the French Think*. Its sweep is thrilling and its expositions lucid, but it carries its learning lightly and is written with an astringent wit. Everyone interested in France and the French will enjoy and learn from this book.”

—ROBERT TOMBS,
Cambridge University

“Few historians would have the courage to write a book with a title like *How the French Think*. But few historians know France, and the French, better than Sudhir Hazareesingh.”

—DAVID BELL,
author of *The First Total War*

“Delightful... [An] affectionate tribute to France’s long love affair with ideas.” —*Financial Times*

BASIC BOOKS

Urge

Oliver Sacks

Walter B., an affable, outgoing man of forty-nine, came to see me in 2006. As a teenager, following a head injury, he had developed epileptic seizures—these first took the form of attacks of déjà vu that might occur dozens of times a day. Sometimes he would hear music that no one else could hear. He had no idea what was happening to him and, fearing ridicule or worse, kept his strange experiences to himself.

Finally he consulted a physician who made a diagnosis of temporal lobe epilepsy and started him on a succession of antiepileptic drugs. But his seizures—both grand mal and temporal lobe seizures—became more frequent. After a decade of trying different antiepileptic drugs, Walter consulted another neurologist, an expert in the treatment of “intractable” epilepsy, who suggested a more radical approach—surgery to remove the seizure focus in his right temporal lobe. This helped a little, but a few years later, a second, more extensive operation was needed. The second surgery, along with medication, controlled his seizures more effectively but almost immediately led to some singular problems.

Walter, previously a moderate eater, developed a ravenous appetite. “He started to gain weight,” his wife later told me, “and his pants changed three sizes in six months. His appetite was out of control. He would get up in the middle of the night and eat an entire bag of cookies, or a block of cheese with a large box of crackers.”

“I ate everything in sight,” Walter said. “If you put a car on the table, I would have eaten it.” He became very irritable, too, he told me:

I raged for hours at inappropriate things at home (no socks, no rye bread, perceived criticisms). Driving home from work a driver squeezed me on a merge. I accelerated and cut him off. I rolled my window down, gave him the finger, and began screaming at him, and threw a metal coffee mug and hit his car. He called the police from his cell. I was pulled over and ticketed.

Walter’s attention assumed an all-or-none quality. “I became distracted so easily,” he said, “that I couldn’t get anything started or done.” Yet he was also prone to getting “stuck” in various activities—playing the piano, for example, for eight or nine hours at a time.

Even more disquieting was the development of an insatiable sexual appetite. “He wanted to have sex all the time,” his wife said.

He went from being a very compassionate and warm partner to just going through the motions. He didn’t remember having just been intimate.... He wanted sex constantly after his surgery...at least five or six times a day. He also gave up on foreplay. He would always want to get right to it.

There were only fleeting moments of satiety, and within seconds of orgasm, he wanted intercourse again and again. When his wife became exhausted, he turned to other outlets. Walter had

always been a devoted and thoughtful husband, but now his sexual desires, his urges, spread beyond the monogamous heterosexual relationship he had enjoyed with his wife.

It was morally inconceivable for him to force his sexual attentions on a man, woman, or child—Internet pornography, he felt, was the least harmful answer; it could provide some sort of release and satisfaction, even if only in fantasy. He spent hours masturbating in front of his computer screen while his wife slept.

After he started viewing adult pornography, various websites solicited him to purchase and download child pornography, and he did. He became curious, too, about other forms of sexual stimulation—with men, with animals, with fetishes.¹ Alarmed and ashamed of these new compulsions, so alien to his previous sexual nature, Walter found himself engaged in a grim struggle for control. He continued to go to work, to go out socially, to meet his friends for meals or movies. During these times he was able to keep his compulsions in check, but at night, alone, he gave in to his urges. Deeply ashamed, he told no one of his predicament, living a double life for more than nine years.

Then the inevitable happened, and federal agents came to Walter’s house to arrest him for possession of child pornography. This was terrifying, but it was also a relief, because he no longer had to hide or dissimulate—he called it “coming out of the shadows.” His secret was exposed now to his wife and his children, and to his physicians, who immediately put him on a combination of drugs that diminished—indeed, virtually abolished—his sexual drive, so that he went from insatiable libido to almost no libido at all. His wife told me that his behavior instantly “reverted back to loving and compassionate.” It was, she said, as if “a faulty switch was turned off”—a switch that had no middle position between on and off.

I saw Walter on several occasions in the time between his arrest and his prosecution, and he expressed fear—mostly of the reactions of his friends, colleagues, and neighbors. (“I thought they would point fingers or throw eggs at me.”) But he thought it unlikely that a court would view his conduct as criminal, in view of his neurological condition.

On this point, Walter was wrong. Fifteen months after his arrest, his case finally came to court, and he was prosecuted

for downloading child pornography. The prosecutor insisted that his so-called neurological condition was of no relevance, a red herring. Walter, he argued, was a lifelong pervert, a menace to the public, and should be put away for the maximum term of twenty years.

The neurologist who had originally suggested temporal lobe surgery and had treated Walter for almost twenty years appeared in court as an expert witness, and I submitted a letter to be

control systems have a middle ground and respond in a modulated fashion, but Walter’s appetitive systems were continually on “go”—there was scarcely any sense of consummation, only the drive for more and more. Once his physicians became aware of the problem, medication readily brought it under control—albeit at the cost of a sort of chemical castration.

In court, his neurologist emphasized that Walter was no longer subject to his sexual urges, and that he had never actually laid hands on anyone other than his wife. (He also noted that, among more than thirty-five cases on record of pedophilia associated with neurological disorders, only two had been arrested and charged with criminal behavior.) In my own letter to the court, I wrote:

Mr. B. is a man of superior intelligence and a real moral delicacy and sensibility, who at one point was driven to act out of character under the spur of an irresistible physiological compulsion.... He is strictly monogamous.... There is nothing in his history or his current ideation to suggest that [he] is a pedophile. He poses no risk to children or to anyone else.

At the end of the trial, the judge agreed that Walter could not be held accountable for having Klüver-Bucy syndrome. But he *was* culpable, she said, for not speaking sooner about the problem to his doctors, who could have helped, and for persisting for many years in behavior that, by supporting a criminal industry, was injurious to others; “yours is not a victimless crime,” she emphasized.

She sentenced him to twenty-six months in prison, followed by twenty-five months of home confinement and then a further five-year period of supervision. Walter accepted his sentence with a remarkable degree of equanimity. He managed to survive prison life with relatively little trauma and made good use of his time in jail, establishing a musical band with some fellow inmates, reading voraciously, and writing long letters (he often wrote to me about the neuroscience books he was reading).

His seizures and his Klüver-Bucy syndrome remained well controlled by medication, and his wife stood by him throughout his years of prison and home confinement. Now that he is a free man, they have largely resumed their previous lives. They still go to the church where they were married many years ago, and he is active in his community.

When I saw him recently, he was clearly enjoying life, relieved that he had no more secrets to hide. He radiated an ease I had never seen in him before.

“I’m in a real good place,” he said. □



Detail of a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, circa 1510–1511

read in court, explaining the effects of his brain surgery. We both pointed out that Walter’s condition was a rare but well-recognized one called Klüver-Bucy syndrome, which manifests itself as insatiable eating and sexual drive, sometimes combined with irritability and distractibility, all on a purely physiological basis. (The syndrome had first been recognized in the 1880s, in lobectomized monkeys, and subsequently described in human beings.)

The all-or-none reactions that Walter had shown were characteristic of impaired central control systems; they may occur, for example, in parkinsonian patients on L-dopa.² Normal con-

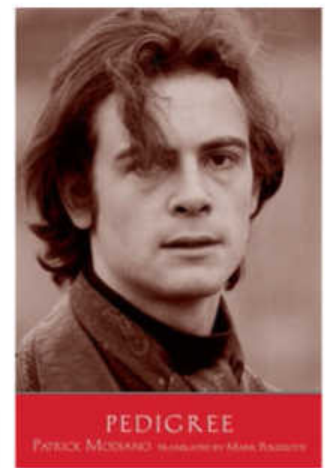
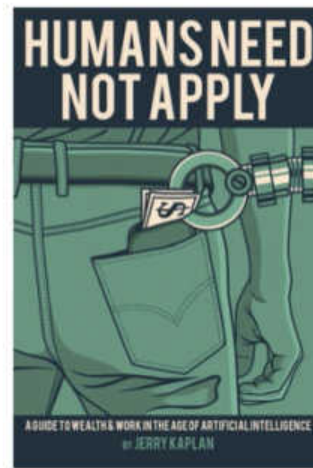
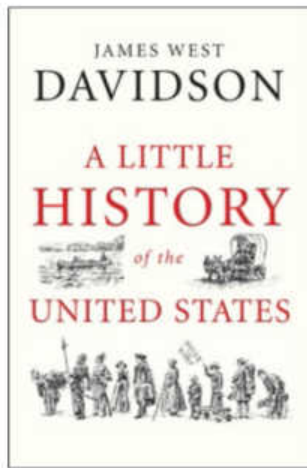
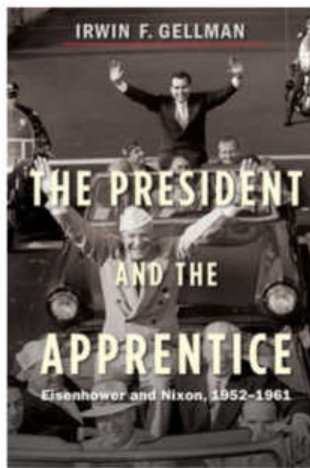
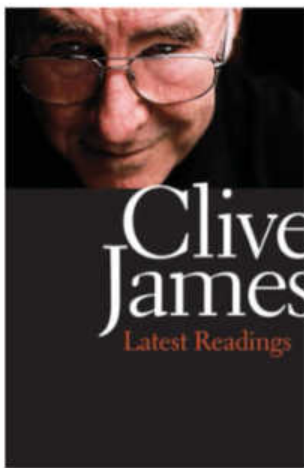
²This also happened with many of my *Awakenings* patients, who had damage to various drive systems in their brains. Thus Leonard L. was, as he later said, a “castrate” with no libido at all before he received L-dopa, but on L-dopa, he developed a ravenous sexual appetite. He suggested that the hospital make a brothel service available for L-dopa-charged patients, and when his plans were frustrated, he masturbated constantly, and often openly, for hours.

¹Such “polymorphous perversion” (as Freud called it) may occur in a number of conditions where dopamine levels in the brain are too high. It developed in some of my post-encephalitic patients “awakened” by L-dopa, and it can occur in association with Tourette’s syndrome or chronic use of amphetamines or cocaine.

CLIVE JAMES, **Latest Readings** “A collection of beautifully thought-out, piquant essays, some only a few pages, that survey what [James] has been reading with the clock ticking. The results are entirely free of self-pity, and emanate vitality and invention.”—*Publishers Weekly*

IRWIN F. GELLMAN, **The President and the Apprentice: Eisenhower and Nixon, 1952–1961** “Gellman’s take on Nixon restores real balance to the study of the man, and his important role in American politics. . . . A deeply researched book.”—History Book Club ■ “An unsettling tour de force.”—David Levering Lewis, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Biography

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JERRY KAPLAN, **Humans Need Not Apply: A Guide to Wealth and Work in the Age of Artificial Intelligence** “New technologies are poised to vastly increase wealth, but for whom? Kaplan makes a persuasive case that future growth may be driven more by assets than labor, and offers unique policy proposals to promote a more equitable future.”—Lawrence H. Summers, former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and President Emeritus of Harvard University

PATRICK MODIANO, **Pedigree: A Memoir**, translated by Mark Polizzotti ■ In this rare glimpse into his life, Modiano takes up his pen to tell the story of his early years. While he admits that his many fictions are all variations of the same story, *Pedigree* is the theme. “Quite a pedigree has this ever-more-fascinating Nobel Prize-winner.”—James Campbell, *TLS* ■ The Margellos World Republic of Letters
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Hitler's World

Timothy Snyder

Nothing can be known about the future, thought Hitler, except the limits of our planet: “the surface area of a precisely measured space.” Ecology was scarcity, and existence meant a struggle for land. The immutable structure of life was the division of animals into species, condemned to “inner seclusion” and an endless fight to the death. Human races, Hitler was convinced, were like species. The highest races were still evolving from the lower, which meant that interbreeding was possible but sinful. Races should behave like species, like mating with like and seeking to kill unlike. This for Hitler was a law, the law of racial struggle, as certain as the law of gravity. The struggle could never end, and it had no certain outcome. A race could triumph and flourish and could also be starved and extinguished.

In Hitler's world, the law of the jungle was the only law. People were to suppress any inclination to be merciful and were to be as rapacious as they could. Hitler thus broke with the traditions of political thought that presented human beings as distinct from nature in their capacity to imagine and create new forms of association. Beginning from that assumption, political thinkers tried to describe not only the possible but the most just forms of society. For Hitler, however, nature was the singular, brutal, and overwhelming truth, and the whole history of attempting to think otherwise was an illusion. Carl Schmitt, a leading Nazi legal theorist, explained that politics arose not from history or concepts but from our sense of enmity. Our racial enemies were chosen by nature, and our task was to struggle and kill and die.

“Nature,” wrote Hitler, “knows no political boundaries. She places life forms on this globe and then sets them free in a play for power.” Since politics was nature, and nature was struggle, no political thought was possible. This conclusion was an extreme articulation of the nineteenth-century commonplace that human activities could be understood as biology. In the 1880s and 1890s, serious thinkers and popularizers influenced by Charles Darwin's idea of natural selection proposed that the ancient questions of political thought had been resolved by this breakthrough in zoology. When Hitler was young, an interpretation of Darwin in which competition was identified as a social good influenced all major forms of politics.

For Herbert Spencer, the British defender of capitalism, a market was like an ecosystem where the strongest and best survived. The utility brought by unhindered competition justified its immediate evils. The opponents of capitalism, the socialists of the Second International, also embraced biological analogies. They came to see the class struggle as “scientific,” and man as one animal among many, instead of a specially creative being with a specifically human essence. Karl Kautsky, the leading Marxist theorist of the day, insisted pedantically that people were animals.

Yet these liberals and socialists were constrained, whether they realized it or not, by attachments to custom and

institution; mental habits that grew from social experience hindered them from reaching the most radical of conclusions. They were ethically committed to goods such as economic growth or social justice, and found it appealing or convenient to imagine that natural competition would deliver these goods. Hitler entitled his book *Mein Kampf—My Struggle*. From those two words through two long volumes and two decades of political life, he was endlessly narcissistic, pitilessly consistent, and exuberantly nihilistic where others were not. The ceaseless strife of races was not an element of life, but its essence.

To say so was not to build a theory but to observe the universe as it was. Struggle was life, not a means to some other end. It was not justified by the prosperity (capitalism) or justice (socialism) that it supposedly brought. Hitler's point was not at all that the desirable end justified the bloody means. There was no end, only meanness. Race was real, whereas individuals and classes were fleeting and erroneous constructions. Struggle was not a metaphor or an analogy, but a tangible and total truth. The weak were to be dominated by the strong, since “the world is not there for the cowardly peoples.” And that was all that there was to be known and believed.

Hitler's worldview dismissed religious and secular traditions, and yet relied upon both. Though he was not an original thinker, he brought a certain resolution to a crisis of both thought and faith. Like many before him he sought to bring the two together. What he meant to engineer, however, was not an elevating synthesis that would rescue both soul and mind but a seductive collision that destroyed both. Hitler's racial struggle was supposedly sanctioned by science, but he called its object “daily bread.” With these words, he was summoning one of the best-known Christian texts, while profoundly altering its meaning. “Give us this day,” ask those who recite the Lord's Prayer, “our daily bread.” In the universe the prayer describes, there is a metaphysics, an order beyond this planet, notions of good that proceed from one sphere to another. Those saying the Lord's Prayer ask that God “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” In Hitler's “struggle for the riches of nature,” it was a sin not to seize everything possible, and a crime to allow others to survive. Mercy violated the order of things because it allowed the weak to propagate. Rejecting the biblical Commandments, said Hitler, was what human beings

must do. “If I can accept a divine Commandment,” he declared, “it's this one: ‘Thou shalt preserve the species.’”

Hitler exploited images and tropes that were familiar to Christians: God, prayers, original sin, commandments, prophets, chosen people, messiahs—even the familiar Christian tripartite structure of time: first paradise, then exodus, and finally redemption. We live in



A Nazi propaganda poster with Ukrainian text that says ‘Hitler, Liberator,’ circa 1941

filth, and we must strain to purify ourselves and the world so that we might return to paradise. To see paradise as the battle of the species rather than the concord of creation was to unite Christian longing with the apparent realism of biology. The war of all against all was not terrifyingly purposeless, but instead the only purpose to be had in the universe. Nature's bounty was for man, as in Genesis, but only for the men who follow nature's law and fight for nature. As in Genesis, so in *My Struggle*, nature was a resource for man: but not for all people, only for triumphant races. Eden was not a garden but a trench.

Knowledge of the body was not the problem, as in Genesis, but the solution. The triumphant should copulate. After murder, Hitler thought, the next human duty was sex and reproduction. In his scheme, the original sin that led to the fall of man was of the mind and soul, not of the body. For Hitler, our unhappy weakness was that we can think, realize that others belonging to other races can do the same, and thereby recognize them as fellow human beings. Humans left Hitler's bloody paradise not because of carnal knowledge. Humans left paradise because of the knowledge of good and evil.

When paradise falls and humans are separated from nature, a character who is neither human nor natural, such as the serpent of Genesis, takes the blame. If humans were in fact nothing more than an element of nature, and nature was known by science to be a bloody struggle, something beyond nature must have corrupted the species. For Hitler the bringer of the knowledge of good and evil on the earth, the destroyer of Eden, was the Jew. It was the Jew who told humans that they were above other animals, and had the capacity to decide their future for themselves. It was the Jew who introduced the false distinction between politics and nature, between humanity and struggle. Hitler's destiny, as he saw it, was to redeem the original sin of Jewish spirituality and restore the paradise of blood. Since *Homo sapiens* can survive only by unrestrained racial killing, a Jewish triumph of reason over impulse would mean the end of the species. What a race needed, thought Hitler, was a “worldview” that permitted it to triumph, which meant, in the final analysis, “faith” in its own mindless mission.

Hitler's presentation of the Jewish threat revealed his particular amalgamation of religious and zoological ideas. If the Jew triumphs, Hitler wrote, “then his crown of victory will be the funeral wreath of the human species.” On the one hand, Hitler's image of a universe without human beings

accepted science's verdict of an ancient planet on which humanity had evolved. After the Jewish victory, he wrote, “earth will once again wing its way through the universe entirely without humans, as was the case millions of years ago.” At the same time, as he made clear in the very same passage of *My Struggle*, this ancient earth of races and extermination was the Creation of God. “Therefore I believe myself to be acting according to the wishes of the Creator. Insofar as I restrain the Jew, I am defending the work of the Lord.”

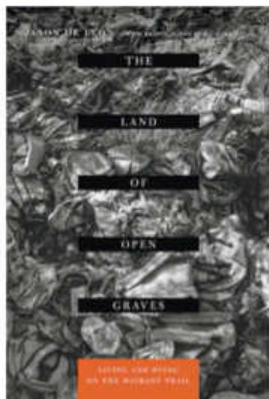
Hitler saw the species as divided into races, but denied that the Jews were one. Jews were not a lower or a higher race, but a nonrace, or a counterrace. Races followed nature and fought for land and food, whereas Jews followed the alien logic of “un-nature.” They resisted nature's basic imperative by refusing to be satisfied by the conquest of a certain habitat, and they persuaded others to behave similarly. They insisted on dominating the entire planet and its peoples, and for this purpose invented general ideas that draw the races away from the natural struggle. The planet had nothing to offer except

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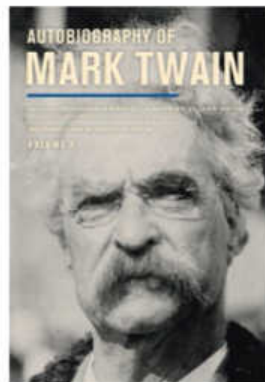


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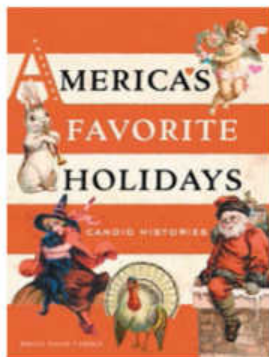


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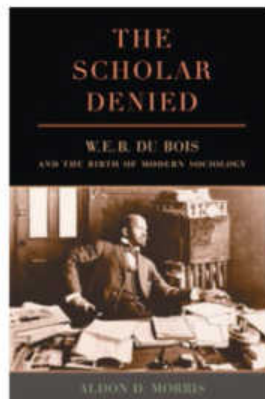


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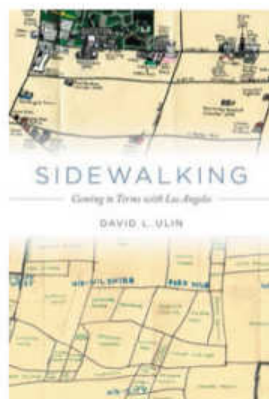
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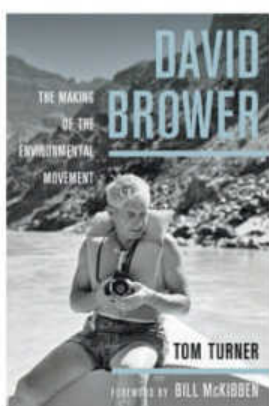


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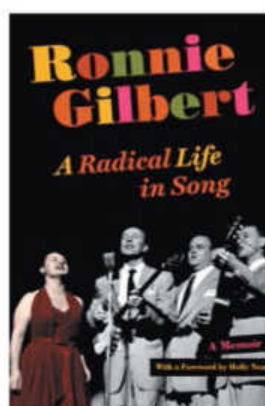


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blood and soil, and yet Jews uncannily generated concepts that allowed the world to be seen less as an ecological trap and more as a human order. Ideas of political reciprocity, practices in which humans recognize other humans as such, came from Jews.

Hitler's basic critique was not the usual one that human beings were good but had been corrupted by an overly Jewish civilization. It was rather that humans were animals and that any exercise of ethical deliberation was in itself a sign of Jewish corruption. The very attempt to set a universal ideal and strain toward it was precisely what was hateful. Heinrich Himmler, Hitler's most important deputy, did not follow every twist of Hitler's thinking, but he grasped its conclusion: ethics as such was the error; the only morality was fidelity to race. Participation in mass murder, Himmler maintained, was a good act, since it brought to the race an internal harmony as well as unity with nature. The difficulty of seeing, for example, thousands of Jewish corpses marked the transcendence of conventional morality. The temporary strains of murder were a worthy sacrifice to the future of the race.

Any nonracist attitude was Jewish, thought Hitler, and any universal idea a mechanism of Jewish domination. Both capitalism and communism were Jewish. Their apparent embrace of struggle was simply cover for the Jewish desire for world domination. Any abstract idea of the state was also Jewish. "There is no such thing," wrote Hitler, "as the state as an end in itself." As he clarified, "the highest goal of human beings" was not "the preservation of any given state or government, but the preservation of their kind." The frontiers of existing states would be washed away by the forces of nature in the course of racial struggle: "One must not be diverted from the borders of Eternal Right by the existence of political borders."

If states were not impressive human achievements but fragile barriers to be overcome by nature, it followed that law was particular rather than general, an artifact of racial superiority rather than an avenue of equality. Hans Frank, Hitler's personal lawyer and during World War II the governor-general of occupied Poland, maintained that the law was built "on the survival elements of our German people." Legal traditions based on anything beyond race were "bloodless abstractions." Law had no purpose beyond the codification of a *Führer's* momentary intuitions about the good of his race. The German concept of a *Rechtsstaat*, a state that operated under the rule of law, was without substance. As Carl Schmitt explained, law served the race, and the state served the race, and so race was the only pertinent concept. The idea of a state held to external legal standards was a sham designed to suppress the strong.

Insofar as universal ideas penetrated non-Jewish minds, claimed Hitler, they weakened racial communities to the profit of Jews. The content of various political ideas was beside the point, since all were merely traps for fools. There were no Jewish liberals and no Jewish nationalists, no Jewish messiahs and no Jewish Bolsheviks: "Bolshevism is Christianity's illegitimate child. Both are inventions of the Jew." Hitler saw Jesus as an enemy of Jews whose teachings had been perverted by Paul

to become one more false Jewish universalism, that of mercy to the weak. From Saint Paul to Leon Trotsky, maintained Hitler, there were only Jews who adopted various guises to seduce the naive. Ideas had no historical origins and no connection to the succession of events or to the creativity of individuals. They were simply tactical creations of the Jews, and in this sense they were all the same.

Indeed, for Hitler there was no human history as such. "All world-historical events," he claimed, "are nothing more than the expression of the self-preservation drive of the races, for better or for worse." What must be registered from the past was the ceaseless attempt of Jews to warp the structure of nature. This would continue so long as Jews inhabited the earth.



Hitler with members of the Nazi Party, Munich, 1930

"It is Jewry," said Hitler, "that always destroys this order." The strong should starve the weak, but Jews could arrange matters so that the weak starve the strong. This was not an injustice in the normal sense, but a violation of the logic of being. In a universe warped by Jewish ideas, struggle could yield unthinkable outcomes: not the survival of the fittest, but the starvation of the fittest.

From this it followed that Germans would always be victims so long as Jews existed. As the highest race, Germans deserved the most and had the most to lose. The unnatural power of Jews "murders the future."

Though Hitler strove to define a world without history, his ideas were altered by his own experiences. World War I, the bloodiest in history, fought on a continent that thought itself civilized, undid the broad confidence among many Europeans that strife was all to the good. Some Europeans of the far right or the far left, however, drew the opposite lesson. The bloodshed, for them, had not been extensive enough, and the sacrifice incomplete. For the Bolsheviks of the Russian Empire, disciplined and voluntarist Marxists, the war and the revolutionary energies it brought were the occasion to begin the socialist reconstruction of the world. For Hitler, as for many other Germans, the war ended before it was truly decided, the racial superiors taken from the battlefield before they had earned their due.

Of course, the sentiment that Germany should win was widespread, and not only among militarists or extremists. Thomas Mann, the greatest of the German writers and later an opponent of Hitler, spoke of Germany's "rights to domination, to participate in the administration of the planet." Edith Stein, a brilliant German philosopher who developed a theory of empathy, considered "it out of the question that we will now be defeated." After Hitler came to power she was hunted down in her convent and murdered as a Jew.

For Hitler, the conclusion of World War I demonstrated the ruin of the planet. Hitler's understanding of its outcome went beyond the nationalism of his fellow Germans, and his response to defeat only superficially resembled the general resentment about lost territories. For Hitler, the German defeat demonstrated that something was crooked in the whole structure of the world; it was the proof that Jews had mastered the methods of nature. If a few thousand German Jews had been gassed at the beginning of the war, he maintained, Germany would have won. He believed that Jews typically subjected their victims to starvation and saw the British naval blockade of Germany during (and after) World War I as an application of this method. It was an instance of a permanent condition and the proof of more suffering to come. So long as Jews starved Germans rather than Germans starving whom they pleased, the world was in disequilibrium.

From the defeat of 1918 Hitler drew conclusions about any future conflict. Germans would always triumph if Jews were not involved. Yet since Jews dominated the entire planet and had penetrated the minds of Germans with their ideas, the struggle for German power must take two forms. A war of simple conquest, no matter how devastatingly triumphant, could never suffice. In addition to starving inferior races and taking their land, Germans needed to simultaneously defeat the Jews, whose global power and insidious universalism would undermine any such healthy racial campaign. Thus Germans had the rights of the strong against the weak, and the rights of the weak against the strong. As the strong, they needed to dominate the weaker races they encountered; as the weak, they had to liberate all races from Jewish domination. Hitler thus united two great motivating forces of the world politics of his century: colonialism and anticolonialism.

Hitler saw both the struggle for land and the struggle against the Jews in drastic, exterminatory terms, and yet he saw them differently. The struggle against inferior races for territory was a matter of the control of parts of the earth's surface. The struggle against the Jews was ecological, since it concerned not a specific racial enemy or territory but the conditions of life on earth. The Jews were "a pestilence, a spiritual pestilence, worse than the Black Death." Since they fought with ideas, their power was everywhere, and anyone could be their knowing or unknowing agent. The only way to remove such a plague was to eradicate it at the source. "If Nature designed the Jew to be the material cause of the decline and fall of the nations," said Hitler, "it provided these nations with the possibility of a healthy reaction." The elimination had to be complete: if one

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Savignac de Miremont, France, 2011

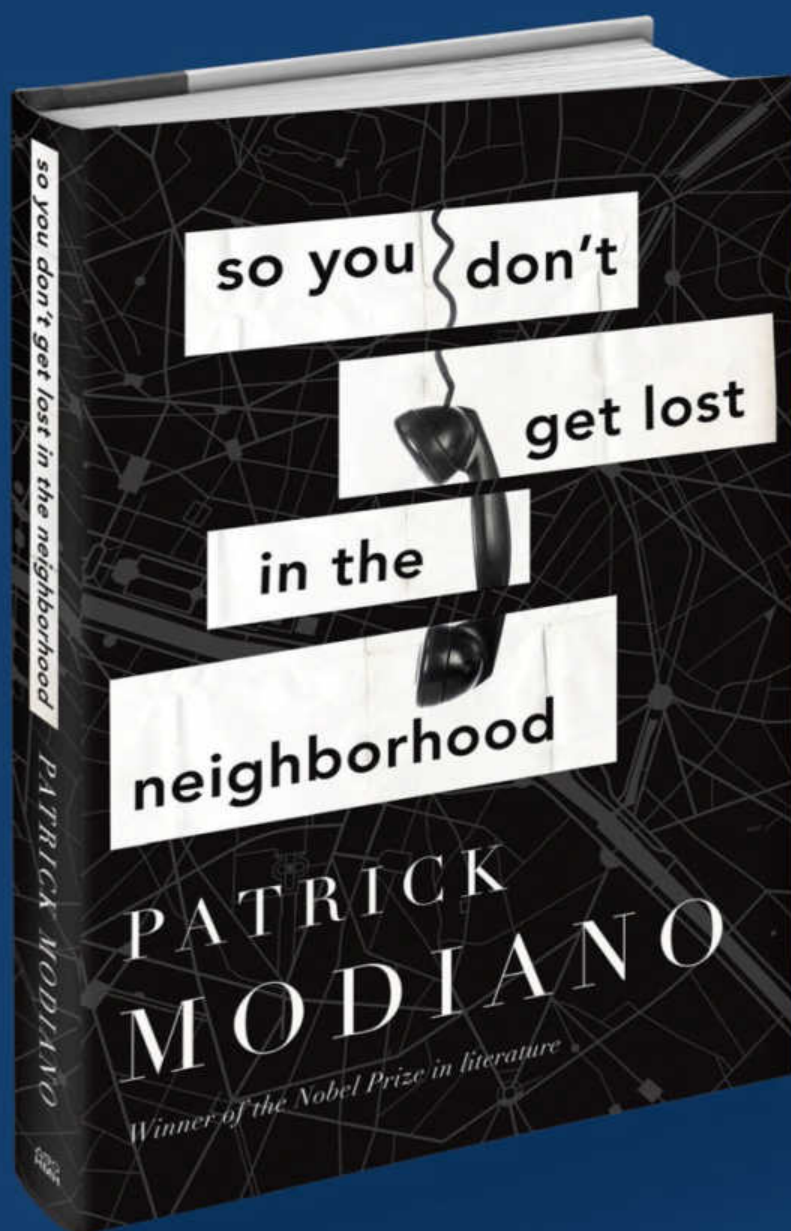
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Jewish family remained in Europe, this could infect the entire continent.

The fall of man could be undone; the planet could be healed. "A people that is rid of its Jews," said Hitler, "returns spontaneously to the natural order."

Hitler's views of human life and the natural order were total and circular. All questions about politics were answered as if they were questions about nature; all questions about nature were answered by reference back to politics. The circle was drawn by Hitler himself. If politics and nature were not sources of experience and perspective but empty stereotypes that existed only in relation to each other, then all power rested in the hands of those who circulated such stereotypes. Reason was replaced by references, argumentation by incantation. The "struggle," as the title of the book gave away, was "mine": Hitler's. The totalistic idea of life as struggle placed all power to interpret any event in the mind of its author.

Equating nature and politics abolished not only political but also scientific thought. For Hitler, science was a completed revelation of the law of racial struggle, a finished gospel of bloodshed, not a process of hypothesis and experiment. It provided a vocabulary about zoological conflict, not a fount of concepts and procedures that allowed ever more extensive understanding. It had an answer but no questions. The task of man was to submit to this creed, rather than willfully impose specious Jewish thinking upon nature. Because Hitler's worldview required a single circular truth that embraced everything, it was vulnerable to the simplest ideas of pluralism: for example, that humans might change their environment in ways that might, in turn, change society. If science could change the ecosystem so that human behavior was altered, then all of his claims were groundless. Hitler's logical circle, in which society was nature because nature was society, in which men were beasts because beasts were men, would be broken.

Hitler accepted that scientists and specialists had purposes within the racial community: to manufacture weapons, to improve communications, to advance hygiene. Stronger races should have better guns, better radios, and better health, the better to dominate the weaker. He saw this as a fulfillment of nature's command to struggle, not as a violation of its laws. Technical achievement was proof of racial superiority, not evidence of the advance of general scientific understanding. "Everything that we today admire on this earth," wrote Hitler, "the scholarship and art, the technology and inventions, are nothing more than the creative product of a few peoples, and perhaps originally of a single race." No race, however advanced, could change the basic structure of nature by any innovation. Nature had only two variants: the paradise in which higher races slaughter the lower, and the fallen world in which supernatural Jews deny higher

racism the bounty they are due and starve them when possible.

Hitler understood that agricultural science posed a specific threat to the logic of his system. If humans could intervene in nature to create more food without taking more land, his whole system collapsed. He therefore denied the importance of what was happening before his eyes, the science of what was later called the "Green Revolution": the hybridization of grains, the distribution of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the expansion of irrigation. Even "in the best case," he insisted, hunger must outstrip crop improvements. There was "a limit" to all scientific improvements. Indeed, all of "the scientific methods of land management" had already been tried and had failed. There was no conceivable improvement, now or in the future, that would allow Germans to be fed "from [their] own land and territory." Food could only be safeguarded by conquest of fertile territory, not by science that would make German territory more fertile. Jews deliberately encouraged the contrary belief in order to dampen the German appetite for conquest and prepare the German people for destruction. "It is always the Jew," wrote Hitler in this connection, "who seeks and succeeds in implanting such lethal ways of thinking."

Hitler had to defend his system from human discovery, which was as much of a problem for him as human solidarity. Science could not save the species because, in the final analysis, all ideas were racial, nothing more than aesthetic derivatives of struggle. The contrary notion, that ideas could actually reflect nature or change it, was a "Jewish lie" and a "Jewish swindle." Hitler maintained that "man has never conquered nature in any matter." Universal science, like universal politics, must be seen not as human promise but as Jewish threat.

The world's problem, as Hitler saw it, was that Jews falsely separated science and politics and made delusive promises for progress and humanity. The solution he proposed was to expose Jews to the brutal reality that nature and society were one and the same. They should be separated from other people and forced to inhabit some bleak and inhospitable territory. Jews were powerful in that their "un-nature" drew others to them. They were weak in that they could not face brutal reality. Resettled to some exotic locale, they would be unable to manipulate others with their unearthly concepts, and would succumb to the law of the jungle. Hitler's first obsession was to expel the Jews to an extreme natural setting, "an anarchic state on an island." Later his thoughts turned to the wastes of Siberia. It was "a matter of indifference," he said, whether Jews were sent to one or the other.

In August 1941, about a month after Hitler made that remark, his men began to shoot Jews in massacres on the scale of tens of thousands at a time, in the middle of Europe, in a setting they had themselves made anarchic, over pits dug in the black earth of Ukraine. □

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Trump

Michael Tomasky

Time to Get Tough: Make America Great Again!

by Donald J. Trump.

Regnery, 216 pp., \$29.99; \$16.99 (paper)

The Donald Trump situation, as anxious Republicans and mystified commentators sometimes call it, only grows more anxiety-producing and mystifying by the week. His performance in the August 6 debate was not considered world-beating. Then, in the wake of it, he was widely perceived as having made reference in a CNN interview to the menstrual cycle of Fox News host and debate moderator Megyn Kelly, which was supposed to finish him off. It was about the fourth such dose of poison but, Rasputin-like, Trump has survived each one.¹ After the debate, he maintained his large lead over the field.

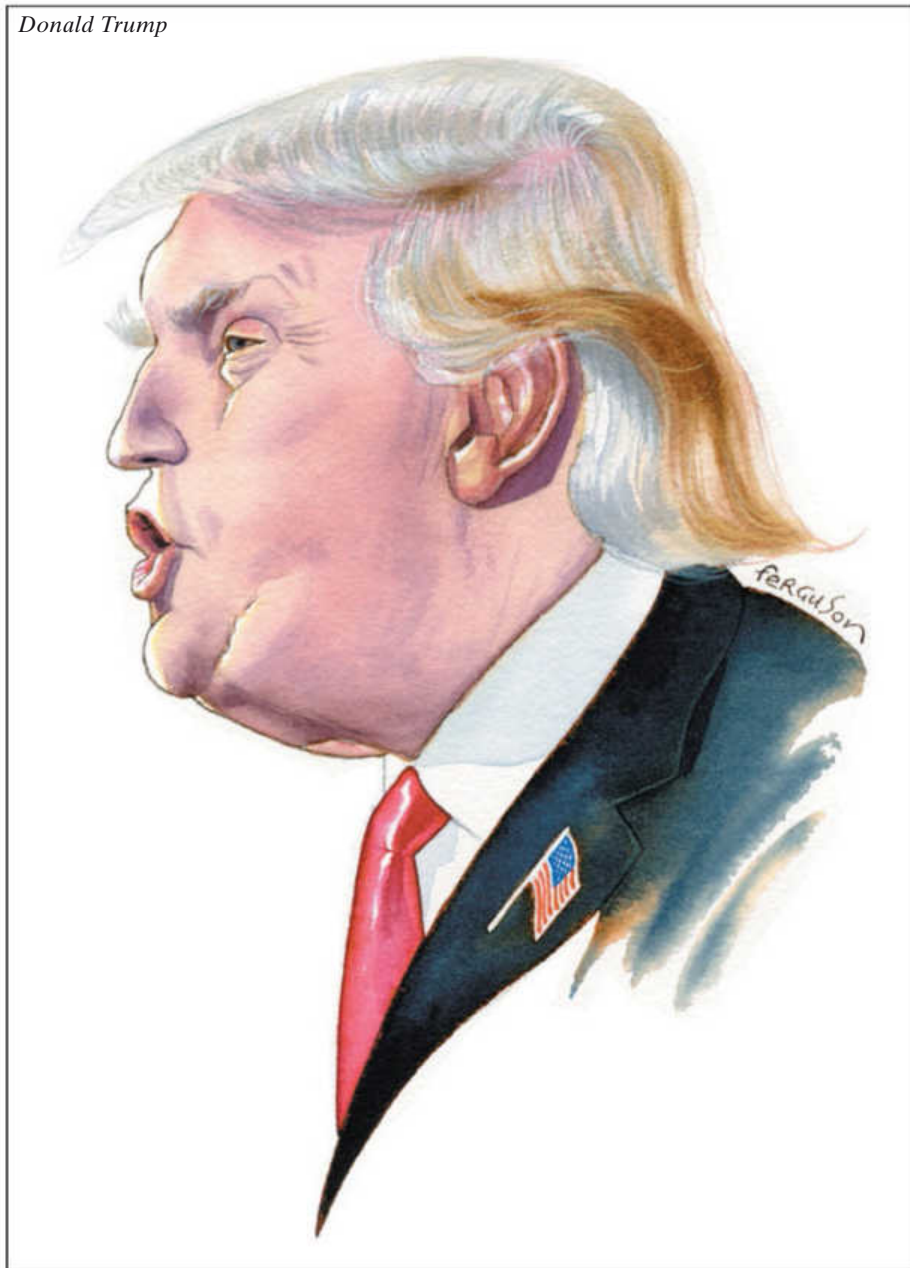
Then on August 11, Trump held his first real campaign-style press conference, in a Michigan town just south of Saginaw. It was rich in the usual self-aggrandizing bluster—but he also showed that he can discuss issues and policy about as well as most of the GOP candidates. That is perhaps not the highest of bars, but he cleared it easily.

On August 21, he held a large rally at a college football stadium in Mobile, Alabama. It seems safe to conjecture that for this native of Queens and resident of midtown Manhattan, this was probably virgin territory. He filled less than 30,000 of its 40,000 seats, but the point was made that he could go deep into the bosom of the Bible Belt and draw a crowd that no other Republican could begin to attract. And now, as autumn approaches and the campaign begins to intensify, we have careened our way into a reality in which the question “who is the current front-runner for the GOP nomination?” has only one plausible answer.

On the one hand, it has seemed impossible to believe that Trump’s candidacy would evolve into something the political leaders and commentators would have to take seriously. For weeks after his June 16 announcement, the experts agreed that surely, this would all just collapse at some point. These experts would dig into the polling and find numbers that seemed to foretell Trump’s imminent demise, and indeed nervous GOP leaders continue to seek solace in results showing that most Republicans don’t believe he’ll be the nominee.

On the other hand, however: Is Trump not the logical culmination of where Republican politics have been headed for many years now, going back to the Clinton and Bush presidencies, but especially during the tenure of Barack Obama? Two qualities more than any others have driven conservatism in our time. The first is cultural and racial resentment, felt by the mostly older and very white population the GOP increasingly represents—resentment against a fast-changing, more openly sexual America, as well as against dark-skinned immigrants, and White House

Donald Trump



occupants, and gay people and political correctness and the “moocher class” and all the rest. The second is what we might call spectacle—the unrelenting push toward a rhetorical style ever more gladiatorial and ever more outraged (and outrageous), driven initially by talk-radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh and now reproduced on websites, podcasts, and Twitter feeds too numerous to mention. There is a strong tendency, perfected over the years by Fox News, to cover and discuss domestic politics as a combination of war, sport, and entertainment all at once.

Well, Trump is conservative resentment and spectacle made flesh. In the four or so years since he first converted himself into a rage machine, banging on about Obama’s birth certificate and so forth, he has developed into an adept at stoking conservative resentment. And while it’s true that Trump has now moved beyond that to embrace a few heterodox and even surprisingly progressive positions, it was resentment—specifically, his remarks about Mexico “sending” us rapists and criminals, back in June—that vaulted him to the top of polls. Trump has continued to stake out far-right positions on immigration, calling for the deportation of around 11 million undocumented people and an end to birthright citizenship, which has been guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment since 1868.

And as for spectacle, Trump is one of the defining showmen of our new Gilded Age, whether we like that fact or not. Grandiosity, ostentation, and at least a touch of vulgarity have been his hallmarks from the beginning, the beginning being his 1980 reopening of the old and dowdy Commodore Hotel at Grand Central as a Grand Hyatt, bathed in marble, mirrors, chrome, and glass—“classy,” to be sure, albeit in a Great Neck catering hall kind of way.

When I first started covering politics in New York during that decade, Trump would regularly bait Mayor Ed Koch into fights that were, well—war, sport, and entertainment all at once. His modus operandi, whether tearing down Bonwit Teller to build Trump Tower then or calling his critics “haters” and “losers” today, is unchanged. When erecting Trump Tower, according to investigative reporter and Trump biographer Wayne Barrett, he threatened a Koch administration official who had denied him a crucial abatement with these words: “I don’t know whether it’s still possible for you to change your decision or not. But I want you to know that I am a very rich and powerful person in this town and there is a reason I got that way. I will never forget what you did.”² The tower, of

²See Wayne Barrett, *Trump: The Deals and the Downfall* (HarperCollins, 1992), p. 184.

course, was built; in 1986, the official left the Koch administration to join the Trump Organization.

That little story underscores the point that what Donald wants, Donald usually gets. It’s very difficult to imagine him actually becoming president. But even if it all comes crashing down next week, Trump has already gotten quite a lot. He has altered Republican politics fundamentally. Certain assumptions about what a Republican politician could and could not get away with doing, assumptions shared by the entire political establishment—that you couldn’t attack a war hero, say, or that a GOP candidate would never dare pick a fight with Fox—have been shattered. When he speaks, the media will listen and, given the ratings he ensures, will give him as much coverage as traffic numbers suggest they ought to.

Republican Party Chairman Reince Priebus is clearly terrified of him. Even Fox News head Roger Ailes—the effective cochairman of the Republican Party for a number of years now—treats him gingerly. Karl Rove wants desperately for the party establishment to block him. They all wish he would go away, even while they must know that they are responsible for Trump because they have spent many years creating an audience that was just waiting for someone like him to come along.

Those are the long-term culprits behind the rise of Trumpism. The three major nearer-term explanations for his success are pretty straightforward. The first is his celebrity. Trump hosts a network prime-time show, NBC’s *The Celebrity Apprentice*, which has run for fourteen seasons (as *The Apprentice* for eight of those seasons). That is a long time to be on prime-time television. *Seinfeld*, one of the most popular television shows in history, lasted nine seasons.

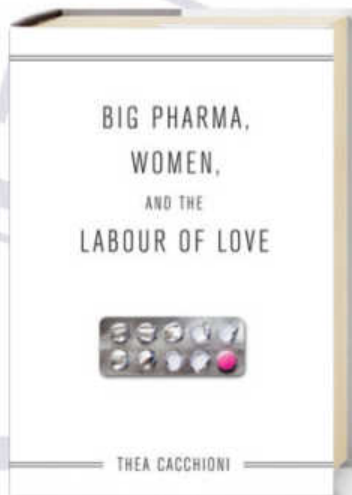
Apprentice ratings have been up and down. In season fourteen, Trump’s show averaged around six million viewers—not great for network TV, but about twice as many as cable news at its highest. Although NBC renewed the show at the last minute for a fifteenth season, and though it may go on, the network severed its ties with Trump after his comments on Mexican immigrants. But the show, on which he ruthlessly judged contestants’ competence and famously fired them as problems were resolved in an hour’s time, has already brought him to a level of celebrity that made his formidable poll numbers possible.

The second reason is the surprising weakness of the rest of the GOP field. Here, the main story is Jeb Bush, because he is the one who was designated the establishment front-runner. Someone is assigned that role in every Republican nomination process—Bob Dole, George W. Bush, John McCain, Mitt Romney. They vacuum up the big money, secure the key endorsements, and develop an aura as the default candidate, the one who ought to win the nomination unless something goes really haywire.

Bush has raised the money and lined up the endorsements, but his aura so far is definitely not that of the default

¹The first three: his reference to Mexican “rapists”; his mockery of John McCain’s war heroism; the revelation that he may have once “violated” his then wife Ivana. All washed off him.

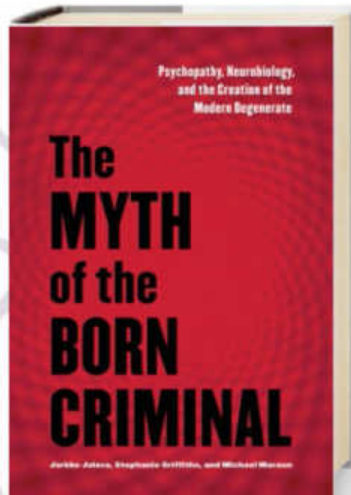
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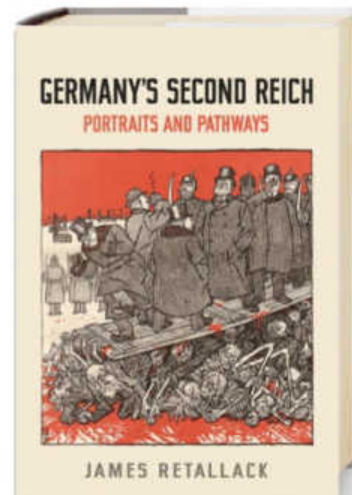


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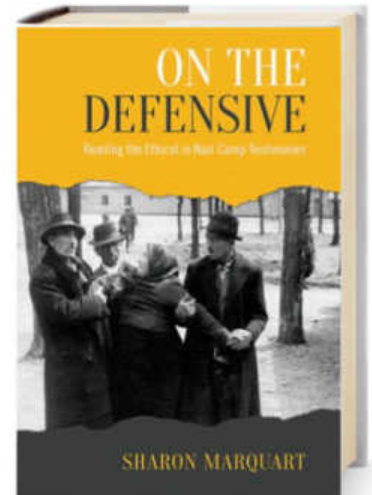


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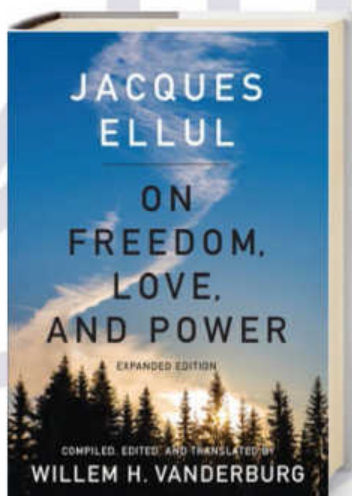


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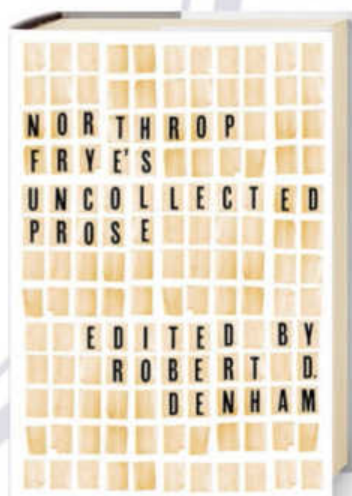


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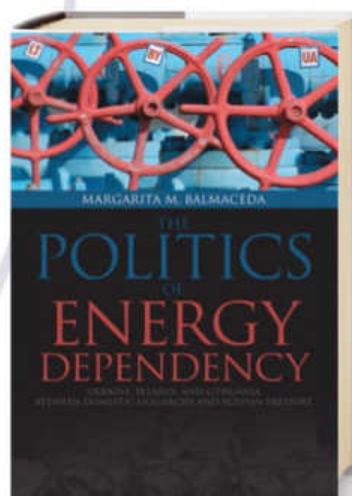
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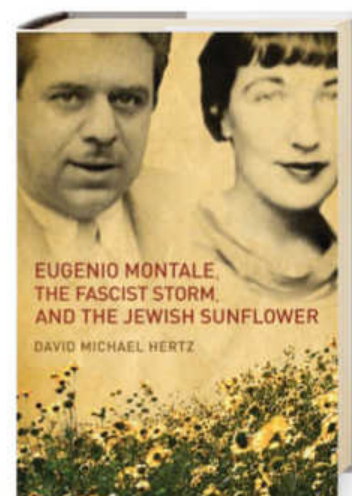
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choice. One has the sense that if he didn't have such a familiar name, he might not even have qualified for that first debate. A part of his problem is ideological. He's trying, with respect to immigration and a couple of other issues, to run a somewhat more centrist campaign than the others, aware that Romney had trouble pivoting back toward the middle in 2012 after taking some very conservative positions to win primary votes. As a result the hard-shell base is highly suspicious of him.

Another Bush problem is simply one of demeanor. He often looks as if he's just not all that interested in what is happening to him and would rather be somewhere else. His debate performance was generally judged to be lackluster, but even it was energetic in comparison to some of his press conferences and speeches, which have been downright morose. Trump, in his characteristically brusque way, put his finger right on it recently when he said, "Jeb Bush is a low-energy person."

Bush still runs fairly well in national polls—he's usually second to Trump, although a pretty distant second. Many observers continue to believe that he'll outlast everyone else by dint of money—as of July 31, Bush had raised \$120 million, compared to Hillary Clinton's \$68 million; the closest Republican was Texas Senator Ted Cruz, at \$52 million.³ But it's worth remembering here that the billionaire Trump has virtually unlimited money without having to raise a cent.

³See "Which Presidential Candidates Are Winning the Money Race," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2015.

The other Republican candidates all have their difficulties. Scott Walker moved himself to the front of the pack earlier this year with a fiery speech in Iowa in which he attacked Chris Christie and Jeb Bush. He's adopted every right-wing position he could since then, but he hasn't really connected viscerally with voters and has slipped a bit in the polls. Marco Rubio was thought to be among the debate's winners, but he's one of those candidates who is somehow slightly better on paper (young, Latino, from Florida) than in the flesh.

Cruz and the African-American neurosurgeon Ben Carson were the debate's biggest beneficiaries, but they're both far too conservative to win a general election. The others just aren't cutting through, with the possible exception of Ohio Governor John Kasich, who could be a strong general-election candidate but who might have a lot of trouble getting there. (He accepted an expansion of federal Medicaid money under Obamacare, about which he'll have a lot of explaining to do.) But the field's collective lack of charisma gave a huge opening to a man with such an outsized personality and ego.

The final cause of Trump's rise has been the intense attention given to him by the political media. The ratings obsessions of the three cable news networks drive the constant Trump coverage. Every morning, cable news executives are able to see which segments did best the previous night among the crucial twenty-five-to-fifty-four-year-old demographic. Chances are it was usually the Trump segments. For news websites from *The New York Times* on down to individual blogs, Trump means traffic.

The viewership figures for the debate, by the way, were staggering at 24 million. Fox News, which broadcast the show, boasted that it was the highest-rated telecast outside of sporting events in the history of cable television. Trump's comments congratulating himself for the big numbers were typical of his rhetoric—he is surely right for the most part that the ratings were about him, but he always overstates things when belittling others. He said that without him, the debate might have drawn two million viewers. But even the earlier, "happy hour" debate featuring the seven contenders who didn't qualify for the main debate drew six million. He can't help denigrating any project that does not have him at its center.

The questions of what Trump actually believes and what policies he would advance have only recently started to attract attention. His record hardly demonstrates a fealty to conservatism. "In many cases, I probably identify more as Democrat," he told CNN's Wolf Blitzer in 2004. "It just seems that the economy does better under the Democrats than the Republicans."⁴ He has also said recently that Bill Clinton was the best of the last four presidents; at the debate, he went well out of his way to point out that he was the only person on the stage who opposed the Iraq war. He recently defended Planned Parenthood's non-abortion-related services, something no other Republican candidate would ever dare to do. Going back farther in time, to a book he wrote in 2000, he backed universal, single-payer health care.

The other, normal candidates would be savaged over such apostasies, but Trump can get away with them (for now) because the occasional heterodoxy continues to publicize Trump as unbought and unbossed and poking a finger in the Republican establishment's eye while also promising to build a Great Wall on the border and "build up our military so strong... that nobody will mess with us." His comment that he would not instantly tear up the Iran nuclear deal should it pass was eye-catching, although he went on to say it was a "horrible deal" and he "would police that contract so tough they wouldn't have a chance." In the Alabama speech, he again attacked the deal, suggesting perhaps that he's been reading the polls that show upward of 80 percent of Republicans opposing it.

And now we have *Time to Get Tough*. Trump wrote the book in 2011 as he was preparing for a 2012 run that he did not in the end pursue. It sits comfortably within the standard campaign self-promotion genre, and within the ideological bounds that should please conservatives (Trump gave the book to Regnery, the conservative house, to publish). It is now being reissued, with, it must be acknowledged, impeccable showman's timing.

What makes the book a bit different, though, and what separates Trump from your typical candidate, is the degree to which he sees politics as a negotiation. He, being the world's greatest negotiator bar none, because he's be-

come a very wealthy man through the art of negotiation, will set lots of things right by force of will. His top targets are OPEC and China:

It starts with China and OPEC. The hundreds of billions of dollars they steal from us each year must end right away. We need a president with a titanium spine who will stand up to these shakedown artists and demand that they get their greedy hands out of our pockets effective immediately.

His proposal is to sue OPEC under US antitrust law. This is not a new idea. In fact it's a very old one. From virtually the moment the cartel raised oil prices for Americans in the 1970s, politicians and international law experts began examining the question of whether an extra-state international organization could successfully be sued in an American court. Opinion is very much divided on the question, to say nothing of whether OPEC wouldn't simply laugh an adverse verdict away.

With respect to China, Trump wants to impose a 25 percent tariff on all goods made there that are sold here. Once we do that, Trump writes,

End of story. You think the Chinese wouldn't respond constructively? No businessman I know would want to turn his back on the US market—and the Chinese wouldn't either.

Perhaps not, but surely the Chinese government would retaliate by slapping tariffs on US-made imports, and that would hurt American exporters. This sort of thing goes on all the time now anyway. The Obama administration has put huge tariffs on Chinese tires and solar panels, and the Chinese have imposed high duties on American cars and trucks.

In the real, complicated world, solving one problem generally means creating another. But Trump's moral universe has no space for such disorder. All it takes is some resolve, titanium again being the key element:

I do deals—big deals—all the time. I know and work with all the toughest operators in the world of high-stakes global finance. These are hard-driving, vicious cutthroat financial killers, the kind of people who leave blood all over the boardroom table and fight to the bitter end to gain maximum advantage. And guess what? Those are *exactly* the kind of negotiators the United States needs, not these cream puff "diplomats" Obama sends around the globe to play patty cake with foreign governments. No, we need smart people with titanium spines and big brains who love America enough to fight fiercely for our interests.

That's the essence of it. His supporters seem to believe that he can do these things; or, even if they don't quite believe, they long for someone who can—who can tame OPEC and China and Iran as if world affairs could be made to be like a reality TV show. This is an understandable yearning to some extent, in an age in which the United States' ability to call the global shots is so much reduced from what it was fifty

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⁴See Chris Moody, "Trump in '04: 'I Probably Identify More as Democrat,'" CNN.com, July 22, 2015.



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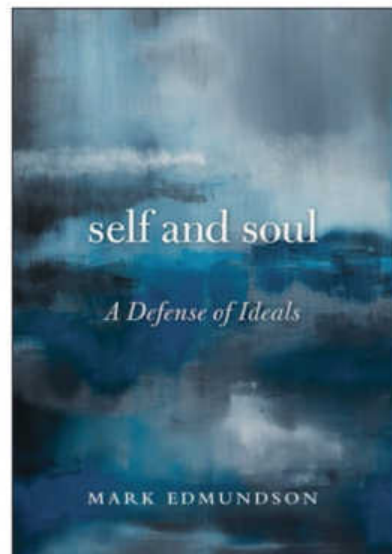
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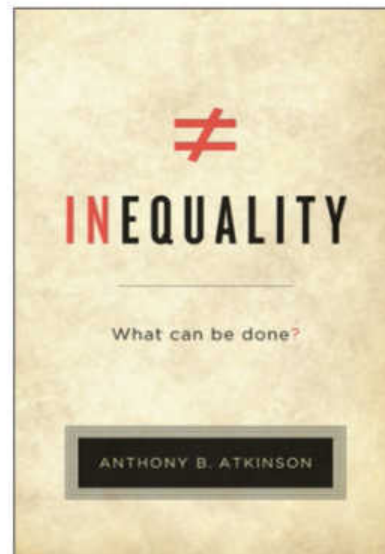
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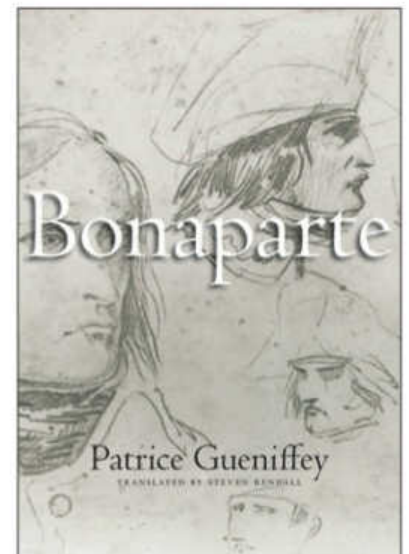
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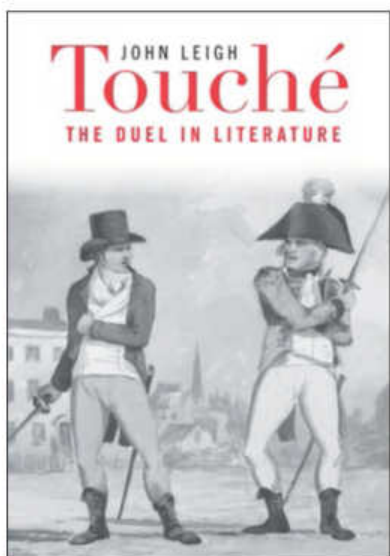
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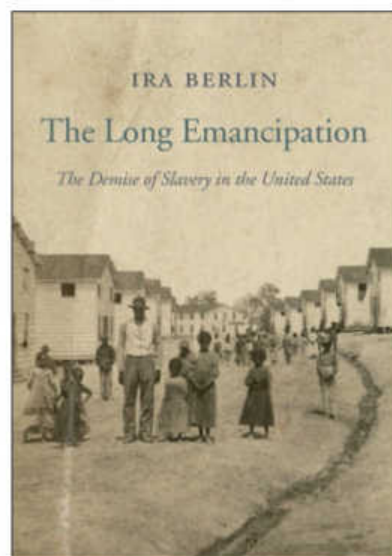
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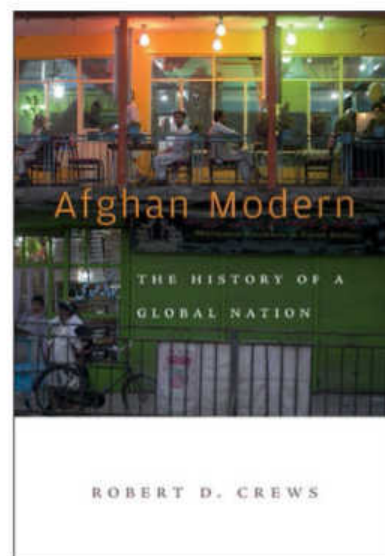
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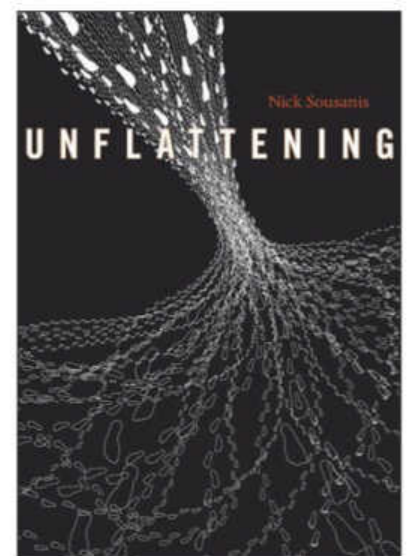
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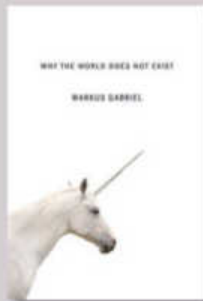
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years ago. But it has a more sinister aspect, this wish for a strong man who can just fix everything. And surely it's also the case for some Trump supporters that after eight years of Obama, a bullying white man is exactly what is needed to restore things to their natural order. It is these qualities that lend Trumpism its faintly disturbing *Face in the Crowd* odor.

On domestic issues, his book is rather dull. Every chapter—on taxes, entitlements, health care, the social safety net—starts out with a few broadsides flung at Obama for being either incompetent, weak, or too left-wing and then moves on to policy prescriptions that have been standard conservative points for years. There would be four marginal tax rates under President Trump, the highest at just 15 percent, and that only on dollars earned above \$1 million. On top of this he would reduce the corporate tax rate to zero. The national treasury would be depleted. But not to worry—working people would get to keep more of their hard-earned money, and they'd get to spend more years earning it, since Trump proposes raising the retirement age.

At this point it would be absurd to keep predicting Trump's imminent collapse. It looks as if he'll be around when they start counting votes in Iowa and New Hampshire, and we'll just see how he does. Over the course of the summer, Republican poll respondents grew to see him more and more favorably, and he led his rivals not just among conservatives but also among moderates, among both men and women, and in all age groups. In a mid-August CNN poll, he vaulted to within six points of Hillary Clinton, dramatically closer than the previous month.

If he's still around next March, Trump could benefit from a change the GOP has made to how delegates are awarded. In primaries and caucuses before March 15, candidates will be awarded delegates proportionately to their vote total; but from March 15 onward, states will have the option of awarding delegates on a winner-take-all basis. This is a change from 2012, and the idea here is to avoid a drawn-out battle of the sort that took place in that year between Romney and Rick Santorum, and to get to a nominee more quickly.

On paper, this change was intended to benefit a front-runner such as Bush. But what if Trump is still running come March 15? He certainly won't lack for money. What if a still-plausible Trump wins primaries in some large, winner-take-all states?

But the real scare Trump puts into the Republican establishment is his threat to run a third-party candidacy. That's a complicated thing to do, since each state has its own ballot access rules; but surely a rich man can pay all

the lawyers he must in order to get on fifty state ballots. Trump would likely qualify for the fall television debates in 2016. And if he got just 4 or 5 percent of the vote in a few key states—Florida, Ohio, Virginia—the result would certainly be a Democratic victory.

Republican Party Chairman Priebus obviously knows this, which is why you only ever hear him say nice things about Trump. And Trump enjoys dangling this sword over the party, as he did in the debate. At his August 11 press conference, he said he wanted to be treated "fairly" by the party:

Fairly means fairly. I want to be treated fairly. I want the establishment—look, I was part of the establishment.

Let me explain. I was the establishment two months ago. I was like the fair-haired boy. I was a giver, a big giver. Once I decided to run, all of a sudden, I'm sort of semi-anti-establishment. Now, leading in all the polls, they're treating me very well. I mean, I'm being treated very well.

Reince Priebus has been terrific. His people have been terrific. They're dealing with my people. They're dealing with Corey [Lewandowski, Trump's campaign manager]. We have a great relationship. I want to run as a Republican. I don't want to run a third party or as an independent. I want to run as a Republican. As long as I'm treated fairly, that's going to be the case.

And fairly is an instinct. It's an instinct. I know what fair is. You know what fair is.

I doubt Trump will pursue such a candidacy. Usually, there's a lot of loose talk in the preelection year, but once the general election is eight, six, four months away, the wilder speculations give way to more conventional habits. For example, it's now less certain than it was two months ago that Hillary Clinton will be the Democratic nominee. But if she is, by next summer all the Democratic voters who say today that she leaves them totally cold will start thinking more about the Supreme Court and all the horrors a Republican president would visit upon the nation and start making their peace with her.

The same dynamic seems likely to occur on the other side. By next spring, Republican voters should have a good sense of which of their choices matches up most competitively against Clinton. If that's not Trump, he'll fade away. But what if he's still popular? After years of settling for the conventional candidate (McCain, Romney), maybe Republican primary voters will follow their collective id and embrace resentment and spectacle. It's certainly where they've been heading for a while now. □

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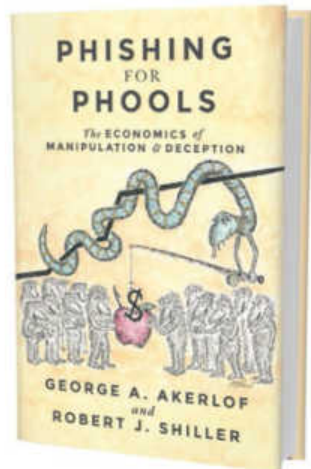
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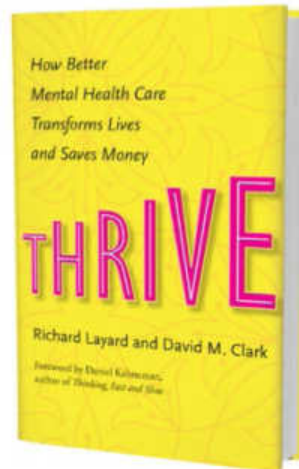
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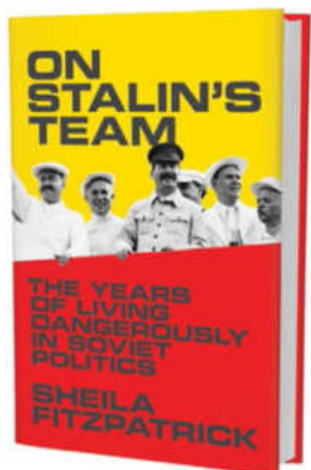
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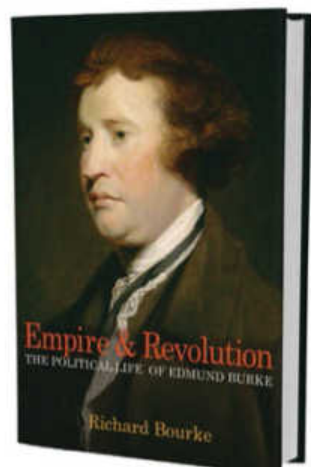
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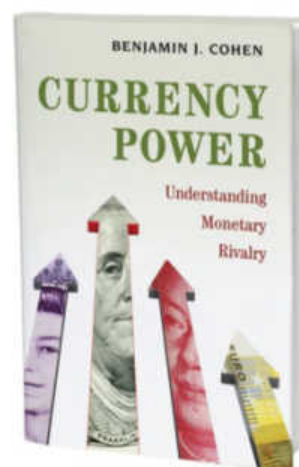
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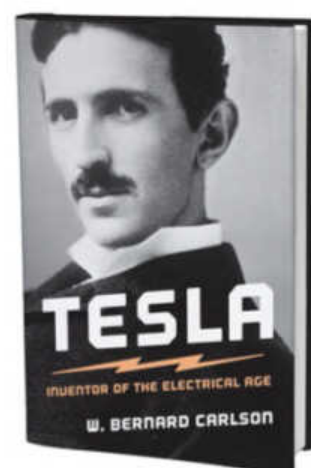
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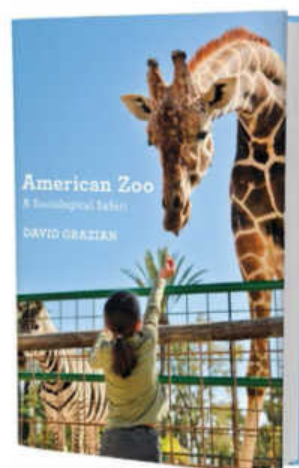
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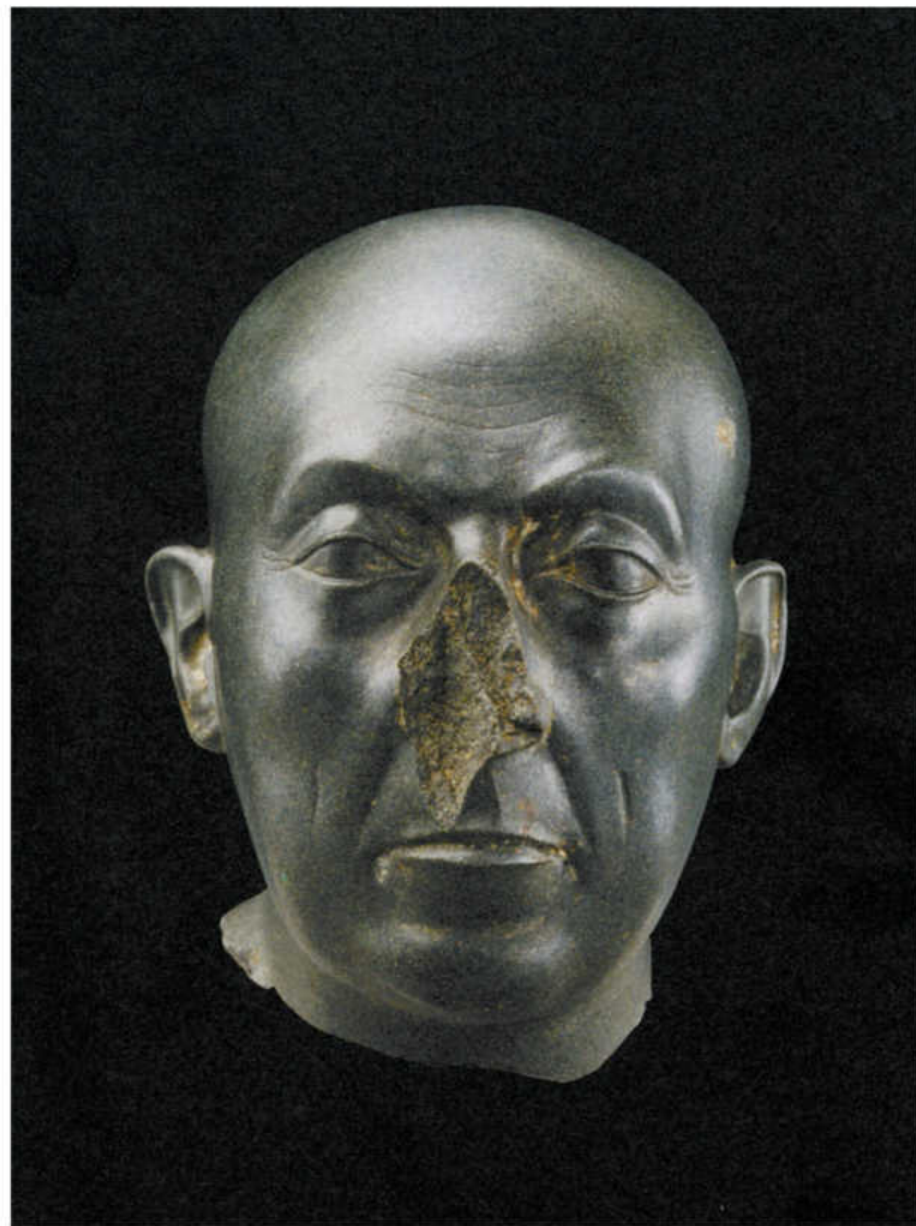
The lives of museum objects almost always span cultures, places, and times. On occasion, they stride across entire civilizations, continents, epochs: gigantic movements distilled in some little bit of matter worked by human hands. Like human lives, the histories of artifacts may end too soon, like the Caravaggio paintings incinerated in the Allied bombing of Berlin in World War II, or the Assyrian sculptures shattered recently by the Islamist vandals of ISIS.

Other objects have lived lives of tranquil obscurity, like the little bronze Etruscan piglet that the archaeologist Kyle Phillips noticed in the National Archaeological Museum in Florence in the early 1980s, one tiny figurine amid a crowd, set on a low shelf in a dusty old showcase. Phillips had a sharp eye for interesting anomalies in objects and people, and he loved animals; perhaps this is enough to explain why he decided to track down the history of a curly-tailed ancient sow modeled in wax and then cast in the fine bronze for which the Etruscans were famous throughout the Mediterranean world.

The piglet, he discovered, came to light in February 1787, when a Tuscan peasant named Valentino Tordini plunged his spade into one of the fields that belonged to his local parish near San Gimignano. Valentino was turning up the soil, as farmers do in that season, to prepare it for spring planting, but finding an Etruscan artifact meant that he might earn some extra money. He rushed to show his find to the parish priest, and the well-oiled bureaucratic wheels of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany began to turn in all their precision.

The priest took the piglet to the mayor, the mayor sent it to the director of the new Natural History Museum in Florence, the director of the Natural History Museum passed it on to the director of the grand duke's art gallery, the director of the art gallery told the grand duke's intimate councillor of finance, and this exalted personage at last put the piglet's case before Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo II himself; only the monarch could decide whether Valentino's figurine, with its slightly damaged legs, would still make a worthy addition to a collection of art and antiquities that had begun with Lorenzo de' Medici. Pietro Leopoldo, a true Enlightenment prince, said yes, and prepared to receive Valentino's piglet officially into the Uffizi Gallery. Since that time, the piglet has moved only twice: first to the National Archaeological Museum that spun off from the Uffizi in 1870, and then to its present location in 1880, where it sits today in its nineteenth-century cabinet. And of course Valentino, at the bottom of this impeccable bureaucratic ladder, eventually did receive a nice reward for having been so alert.

As Kyle Phillips discovered, the story of Valentino's piglet is mostly a story of paperwork, all of it meticulously preserved in those boundless civic archives



'Head of a Priest' (The Boston Green Head); Egyptian, 380–332 BC

that are one of the wonders of Italy. This, however, is paperwork in beautifully elaborate cursive writing with language to match, drafted by people with rococo names like Giuseppe Benicivenni già Pelli (the director of the gallery) and Luigi di Schmidweiller (the intimate councillor), cosmopolitan scholar-statesmen with fascinating stories of their own. In their hands, red tape was an art form (the very phrase "red tape" refers to the twentieth-century ties that bind the boxes in which these documents are often stacked). By the early 2000s, the wood-and-glass vitrine that has held Valentino's piglet since 1880 had become a valued objet d'art in itself. Today both the antique case and its ancient contents, slightly derelict in 1983, shine as proudly dust-free as when they were new.¹

Valentino's piglet, for all its charm, is one among a great multitude of small Etruscan bronzes. But an object only slightly larger, the ancient Egyptian portrait known as the Boston Green Head, is almost one of a kind, and its story, recounted with gusto by Lawrence Berman in *The Priest, the Prince, and the Pasha*, is as typical of

¹Kyle Meredith Phillips Jr., "An Etruscan Bronze Found at San Gimignano in 1787," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Antiquité*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (1992). The article was written in 1983 and published posthumously.

the Romantic era as Valentino's piglet is typical of the Enlightenment, a tale not only engagingly told, but also beautifully and imaginatively illustrated with vintage paintings, engravings, and photographs. As it turns out, the biography of this sculpture, no bigger than a softball, involves several pashas, as well as a sprinkling of emperors, ancient and modern, and at the heart of it all, the enigmatic Egyptian priest who has been immortalized in a hard greenish stone called graywacke.

Graywacke is not an easy material to carve; the person who went to the trouble of commissioning this image, most probably the very same bald, jowly, thin-lipped man whose features it portrays with such uncompromising clarity, must have held a substantial position in Egyptian society. His bald head identifies him as a priest. In ancient Egypt, temple employees shaved their scalps and bodies to keep away parasites, for those ancient wigs we see on so many mummies, including those of many a royal family, were crawling with lice. The statue has been badly damaged and most of it is missing, but at the back of this little head we can see the remains of a supporting pillar inscribed at the top with the beginning of a prayer. A pillar implies that the head must once have belonged to a standing figure a little over a foot tall, clad in a linen skirt, holding a miniature temple in his hands as a sacred offering. The subject's nose has been smashed away except for its impressive

bridge, but despite this physical damage the authority of his strong, creased face, with its wary eyes, shines forth undiminished.

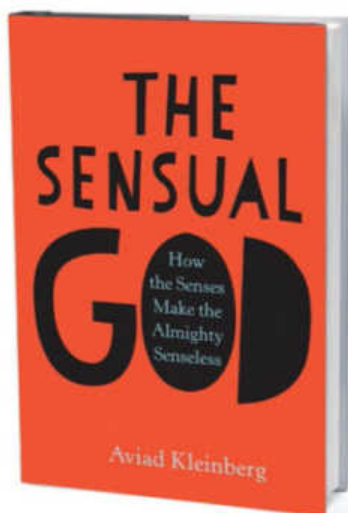
Modern Egyptologists have dated the work to very late in the millennial course of Egyptian history: either to the Saite period (twenty-sixth dynasty, 664–525 BC, with a capital at Sais on the Nile delta), or to the Egyptian thirtieth dynasty, 380–343, which ruled from another delta city, Sebennytos, until the Persian army invaded in 343. These were the two periods when Egyptian sculptors were most apt to work the rare, precious graywacke, which came from a remote desert quarry in the Eastern Desert (Wadi Hammamat) and could only be obtained by mounting a costly expedition. Berman himself, senior curator of Egyptian, Nubian, and Near Eastern art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, sets the Green Head in the fourth century, during the thirtieth dynasty, but notes a certain amount of Greco-Roman influence in the careful efforts to record the unknown priest's weather-beaten skin, furrowed brow, and the slightly projecting mole beneath his left eye.

Although Egyptian sculpture often presents its subjects in a state of smooth-faced, eternal youth, there were times in the country's history when individual pharaohs or individual people asked artists to preserve all the signs of age and vulnerability on their faces. These times were usually troubled, times when invaders disturbed the endless flow of life along the Nile. The Bronze Age pharaoh Senwosret III (1878–1840 BC), a fierce and successful warlord who came between two periods of turmoil, wore his worries plainly on his face, as we can see in a marvelous fragment in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Sadly, the owner of the Green Head may well have lived to see his own orderly existence rudely interrupted: Berman suggests that his portrait statue shattered when a Persian invader in 343 BC tried to carry it off and dropped it instead. Whether he himself was around to see the disaster we cannot know.

The Green Head first saw the light of the modern world in 1857 at Saqqara, the burial ground for the ancient capital of Memphis, now a southern suburb of Cairo, on the west bank of the Nile. Ancient Egyptians associated the west with death, for every evening, in that direction, they watched the dying sun leave its day boat, the heavenly vessel that carried it across the sky, and slip beneath the edge of the earth. (Fortunately, a night boat lay ready to ferry it back eastward through the Underworld for rebirth the next morning.) For five thousand years, Saqqara's most prominent monument has been the Step Pyramid completed in 2648 BC for the pharaoh Djoser, still surrounded by a monumental precinct that has barely weathered in the crisp desert air. The architect who designed this complex, Imhotep, was eventually revered as a god in his own right.

But the wonders of Saqqara also include a newer monument, four centuries younger than Imhotep's masterpiece:

Henry Lillie Pierce Fund/Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



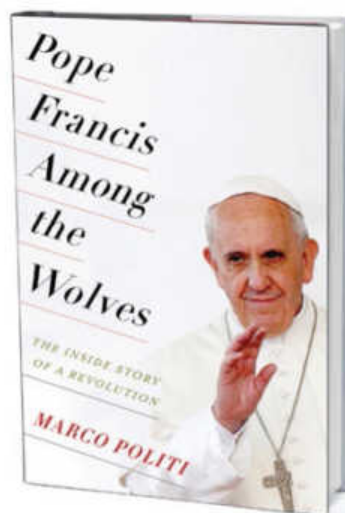
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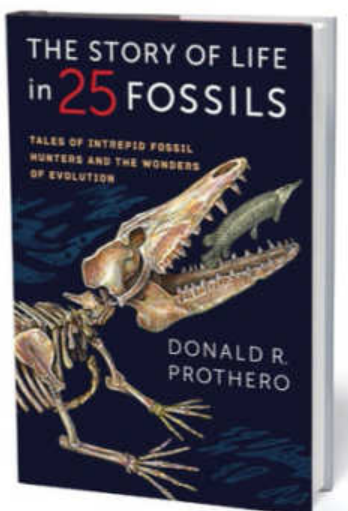
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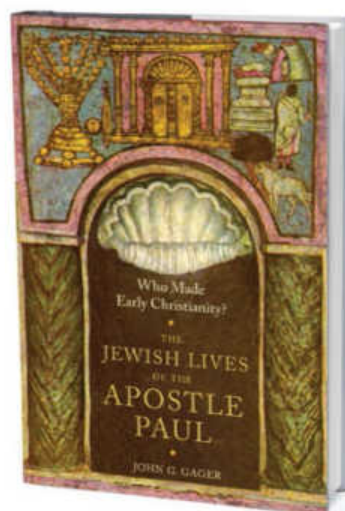
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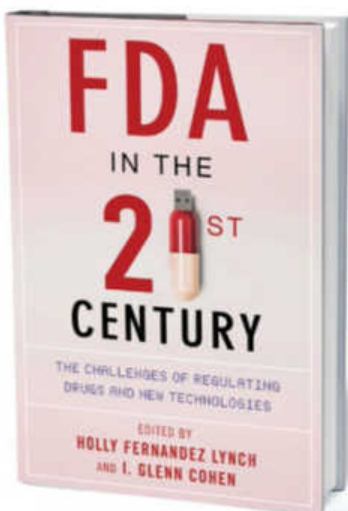
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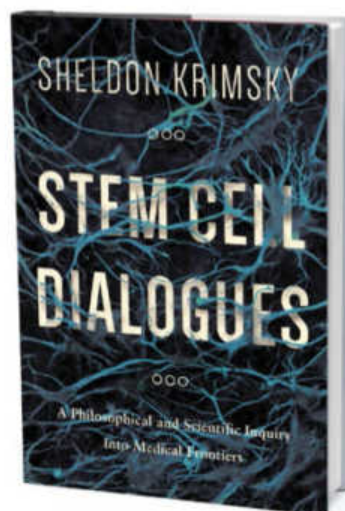
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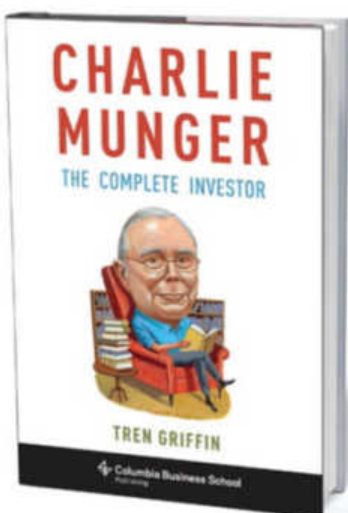
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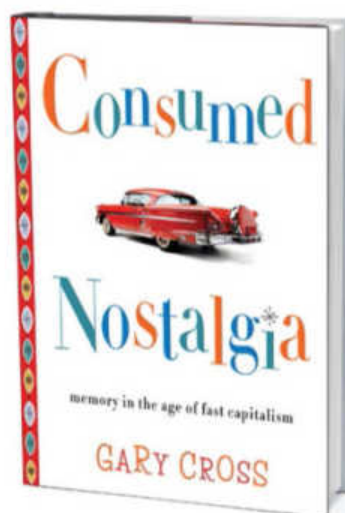
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a vast underground gallery just to the northwest of the Step Pyramid where, in 1851, the French archaeologist François Auguste Ferdinand Mariette uncovered the subterranean tombs of over sixty cows and bulls. These were the sacred Apis bulls, interred together with their divinely fortunate mothers, which were described by the ancient Greek writer Herodotus:

The Apis is the calf of a cow which is never afterwards able to have another. The Egyptian belief is that a flash of light descends upon the cow from heaven, and this causes her to conceive Apis. The Apis-calf has distinctive marks: it is black, with a white square on its forehead, the image of an eagle on its back, the hair on its tail double, and a scarab under its tongue.

These special markings identified an Apis calf as an incarnate god. Alive, he was venerated as the herald of Ptah, the tutelary god of Memphis, and hence a symbol of pharaoh. In death he took on an association with Osiris, the lord of the underworld. Once an Apis calf had been revealed as such, he was brought to the temple of Ptah and housed amid his own harem of cows, while his mother received her own special honors. With a lifespan of about twenty-five to twenty-eight years, a sacred bull could expect to reign as long as many a pharaoh. Surviving paintings of Apis bulls often show sleek black beauties like the specimen Herodotus describes, but at least one image, inlaid in glass (and illustrated in Berman's book), portrays a piebald bull with big spots of black on white.

Saqqara's cemetery for these divine cattle dates from the time of Thutmose III (1479–1425 BC), but it was still in use during the reign of Cleopatra VII, fourteen centuries later. Somewhere in its underground galleries the Boston Green Head seems to have been picked up by a workman, minus its body, but Mariette did not supply any specifics. To judge from where it was found, however, the head's owner must have been a priest of Ptah, the creator god of craftsmen and architects, and thus the divine father of the godly architect Imhotep. Ptah's consort was sexy Sekhmet, the lion-headed war goddess whose hot breath had formed the desert. The Green Head's owner, the nameless fourth-century priest of Ptah, must have resided in Memphis, tending the Apis bull for a living, and commissioned his portrait statue to stand among the tombs of his sacred charges after death had taken them all.

Excavation records for the Saqqara cemetery are scant and hasty, because Mariette uncovered this vast, impressive monument and its contents on the sly. According to his research grant from the French government, he had come to Egypt in 1850 to inventory the manuscripts held in Egyptian monasteries and to buy Egyptian papyri for the Louvre. Quickly, however, he gathered a group of workmen and started digging, both at Memphis, which was within the cultivated area of the Nile bank, and at desert-dry Saqqara. He found the cemetery, buried deep in sand, by following an ancient highway lined by hundreds of crouching sphinxes. He was clever enough to track its path when it made an abrupt turn, swift enough to overtake all his

competitors. A dreamy pastel portrait from 1859 shows Mariette in profile wearing a fez. By this time, at thirty-seven, he had been appointed Egypt's first director of antiquities. In 1853, a German colleague provided an equally vivid word-picture of this remarkable man:

He was of great height, with a strong body, his face, framed by a blond beard, was burnt red-brown like that of an Egyptian fellah [peasant]; in his features lay a certain melancholy which, on the other hand, could be displaced instantly by a striking cheerfulness.... He possessed a deep worldly wisdom in all his plans which miscarried in only one point—which in this wicked world is an essential one—



Glass inlay of an Apis bull, 305–330 AD

in all money matters which came his way.... He was, so he explained to me, much more an artistic nature, which feels its only satisfaction in form.

Mariette gave that artistic nature free rein in a variety of media, including Giuseppe Verdi's Egyptian-themed opera *Aida*, for which he has often received credit for supplying the original story.² He undoubtedly oversaw the scenery and costumes for the first production at the Cairo Opera House in 1871, basing them firmly on the real Egyptian artifacts he knew so well. The setting, appropriately, is Memphis, and the god who dominates the action is "immenso Ptah." Were the Green Head not so small, we might even imagine its owner in the role of Ramfis, Verdi's high priest.

Mariette shipped forty-one crates of material from Saqqara to Paris in February 1852. (At this point the Green Head still lay buried in the sands.) His archaeological discoveries earned him swift promotion in France; in Janu-

²In 1993, the Verdi scholar Mary Jane Phillips-Matz argued that the real author was Temistocle Solera, with whom Verdi had quarreled, and who therefore passed the scenario to Mariette, who gave it to the composer. See *Verdi: A Biography* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 570–573. Verdi certainly thought that Mariette was the author.

ary 1852, as he packed his crates, he learned of his appointment as associate curator of Egyptian antiquities at the Louvre. Later the same year, he was inducted as a knight of the Legion of Honor. By 1854, however, his grant had run out, and he returned to France. "I did not find any Coptic or Syriac monuments," he wrote. "I did not make the inventory of any library, but, stone by stone, I brought back a temple."

When Mariette returned to Egypt in 1857, it was thanks to a prince and a pasha. The prince was Napoleon-Joseph-Charles-Paul Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon I and cousin of Napoleon III. As a little boy, he pronounced his own name as "Plon-Plon," and Plon-Plon he would remain for the rest of his

as self-consciously antique as the Getty Villa in Malibu, and that is where the inaugural issue of the *Gazette des beaux-arts* caught up with the Green Head in 1859. An engraved illustration described the head as belonging to an "eunuque." The prince's versatile aide-de-camp, Marcel-Victor-Paul-Camille Ferri Pisani, provided the accompanying article, exulting:

The perfection of the modeling, the truth of the details, the expression of life, are beyond belief, and are combined with a sobriety of line and an incredible simplicity of means; the sculptor's art can go no further.

But Plon-Plon soon tired of his antiquarian amusements. In 1866, he put up his Maison Pompéienne for sale. In 1868, he liquidated his collection. The Green Head disappeared from the record until 1903, when the American aesthete and eccentric Edward Perry "Ned" Warren donated it to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Warren's parents number among the first supporters of the Museum of Fine Arts, and young Ned grew up entranced with his mother's porcelains, a passion he would later transfer to ancient Greek vases. After graduating from Harvard, he enrolled for a second degree at New College, Oxford. The highlight of this experience was a trip to Greece, culminating in a visit to the oracular site of Delphi.

In 1888, the year after he graduated, Ned's father died, leaving him a small fortune. This he invested in a house in Lewes, West Sussex, where he created a commune of young men like himself, devoted to their own version of the Platonic life, physically austere, spiritually intense, charged with eros. As a "Boston gentleman now residing in Europe," Warren also began donating generous "sendings" of antiquities to the Museum of Fine Arts. In 1903, his sending included the Green Head, which he described only as "Small head of an old man, smooth face." As a work of Egyptian rather than Greek art, it could not be perfectly beautiful in Warren's eyes. Ironically for so perspicacious a collector of art, Ned had lifelong trouble with his eyes, but in the case of the Green Head his blindness was entirely cultural. Fortunately, however, he popped it into his sending, and it was Boston's to admire.

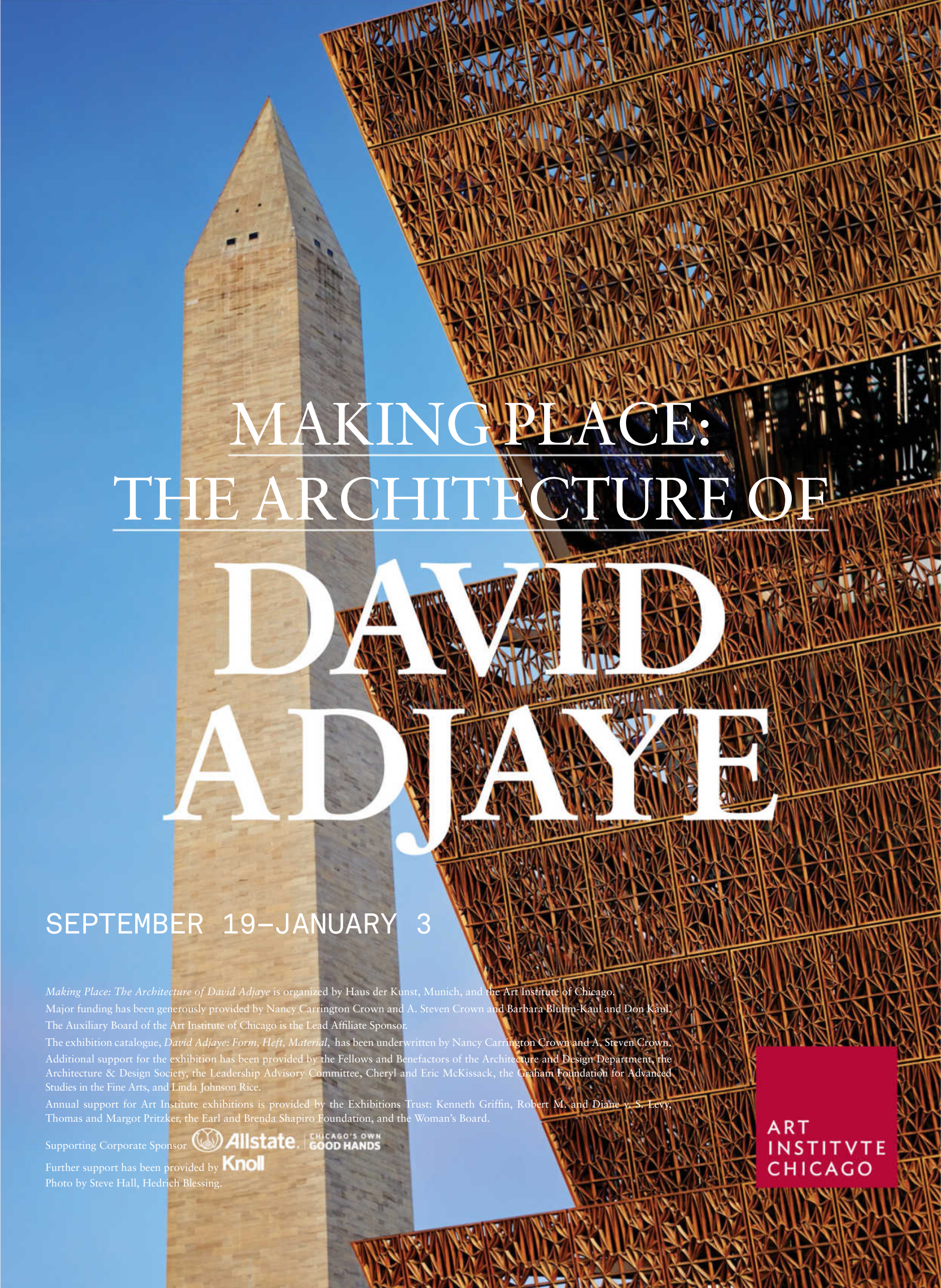
"So what is it about the Green Head that makes it so compelling?" Berman asks a little over a century later, when the work can be openly acknowledged as a small-scale masterpiece. In part, he thinks it is the head's damaged condition that lends it an such enigmatic quality: the absence of a body, the broken nose. For curator Bernard von Bothmer, writing in 1960, it was the quality of the carving: "It is no exaggeration to say that nowhere else have bone and skin been so sensitively handled in an Egyptian portrait." Berman suggests that the head, damaged in 434 BC by a Persian vandal, may have been piously reburied circa 431 BC on the order of Alexander the Great. Whoever its owner may have been, he must have commissioned this portrait in hard stone to perpetuate his name through the ages. Instead, we have nothing but his weathered face, one of the greatest works of Egyptian art: silent, perhaps, yet anything but mute. □

life. Of all the Bonaparte family, Plon-Plon was the one who looked most like his famous uncle, albeit a chubbier, jollier version of the emperor, and like the emperor, the prince decided that he really must see Egypt. This was glorious news to the Egyptian viceroy, Muhammad Said Pasha, who summoned Mariette back to Cairo in 1857 on the advice of the French consul Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had his own agenda: he hoped to enlist the prince's support for his pet project, the Suez Canal.

Mariette's assignment was to litter the prince's way with antiquities to be conveniently "discovered" as he passed, but he too had a pet scheme of his own: establishing a government service in Egypt to protect its antiquities from destruction. Elated, he returned to excavating some of his old haunts, including Saqqara, and it was during this campaign that workers uncovered the Green Head. And then, with the New Year of 1858, Plon-Plon dashed everyone's hopes by canceling his trip; he had his marriage to arrange. By February, Mariette had been summoned back to the Louvre. He bought himself another month in Egypt by suggesting that the prince might enjoy a packet of choice Egyptian artifacts, but at last, in March, he and his artifacts, including the Green Head, made their way to Paris.

Plon-Plon installed his antiquities in his remarkable retreat, the Maison Pompéienne, a Roman-style structure

Gift of Mrs. Horace L. Mayer/Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



MAKING PLACE: THE ARCHITECTURE OF DAVID ADJAYE

SEPTEMBER 19–JANUARY 3

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Daddy's Girl

Diane Johnson

Go Set a Watchman
by Harper Lee.
Harper, 278 pp., \$27.99

1.

Since its publication in 1960, Harper Lee's best-selling *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been described as America's favorite book. It is required reading in many high schools and junior high schools and in schools in some foreign countries, and continues to sell more than a million copies a year. In it, a charming, combative child, Scout Finch, growing up safe and unconstrained in the small, old-fashioned, southern town of Maycomb, Alabama, glimpses some ugly realities of black-white relations and worships the exemplary behavior of her father, Atticus Finch, as he defends a black man falsely accused of rape and eloquently articulates many of our highest principles. For American readers, Atticus Finch has become an icon of lawyerly integrity, and the book itself an eloquent plea for racial harmony and civil rights.

After the huge success of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the author withdrew to spend more and more time in her real-life small southern town of Monroeville, Alabama, and to general dismay, announced that she had "said what I wanted to say and will never say it again." She published nothing further, so when after more than fifty years a new novel was announced, the joy, excitement, and calculation may be imagined; it was as if someone had found a sequel to *Gone With the Wind*. Pre-publication of the great discovery was surrounded by hush-hush embargoes and restrictions, and suspense mounted about what new literary pleasures and surprises this very much desired sequel would bring. *Go Set a Watchman* was a huge best seller even before its release.

The first reactions were of wary disappointment, charitable attempts to praise the many good qualities of the new novel, and, almost immediately, close rereadings of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to see how the two works fit together. Above all, people wondered why *Watchman* was so much less accomplished than *Mockingbird*. A host of extraliterary issues immediately began to shadow its reception: first, the circumstances of its discovery, which raise questions of provenance and ownership; second, the work of its editors, both here and in the case of Lee's earlier novel, the now classic *Mockingbird*; third, the implications of Lee's possible mental and physical impairments for any critical approach to the work (are late de Koonings worth as much as those done before his Alzheimer's?); fourth, the actual quality of the work itself; and finally, what was going to happen to the vast sums of money already mounting up?

Since suffering a stroke in 2007, the reclusive Harper Lee has been in an assisted living facility in Monroeville, watched over by her lawyer sister "Miss Alice" Lee until Alice's death (aged 103) in 2014. A few days after Miss Alice died, the manuscript was "found" in "a secure location" by her present lawyer, Tonja Carter, Alice's assistant.



Harper Lee with Mary Badham, who played Scout in the 1962 film of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Carter took the felicitous discovery to the appropriate literary agent, and has since explained that

accidents of history sometimes place otherwise unknown people in historic spotlights. Such was my fate when last August curiosity got the best of me and I found a long-lost manuscript written by one of America's most beloved authors.

Carter's account, however, has been challenged on several points, especially about when she found the manuscript; according to some, it was the subject of a 2011 meeting between agents and an appraiser at which Carter was present, though she says she wasn't there for all of it and never saw the manuscript back then. If she had been there, it suggests that she and others knew about the manuscript and were sitting on it until Miss Alice Lee died, perhaps because she would have objected to its publication. The granddaughter of the original editor, Tay Hohoff, has been quoted as saying that her grandmother would not have approved of *Go Set a Watchman* in its present form, that is, without detailed editorial work, though Harper Lee has been said by her publisher to want "the novel published exactly as it was written, without editorial intervention." Does this explain the difference in literary quality and social point of view?

Compared to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Go Set a Watchman* is cursory, often

clumsy, and seems to modify, even reverse, some of the attitudes and events of the first novel, raising questions about the part of editors in *Mockingbird*'s more accomplished writing and liberal tone. According to its editors and Harper Lee herself, *To Kill a Mockingbird* had profited from extensive editing at R.B. Lippincott by the late Tay Hohoff, who said that she and Lee worked for two years on the project. Lee's representatives have explained that *Go Set a Watchman* is in fact the original manuscript from the 1950s, minus the parts that became *Mockingbird*—parts that focus on Scout's childhood. *Watchman* is in effect cobbled together from the remainders that were too good to lose after *Mockingbird* was extracted and augmented with editorial help.

The "new" novel *Go Set a Watchman* uses material about Scout in her twenties, and develops the real subject of the original manuscript: disillusion with her father and the South. (About the editing, the English newspaper *The Guardian*, not constrained by our national sensitivities, remarks that in reading *Go Set a Watchman*, "it is hard not to feel some awe at the literary midwives who spotted, in the original conception, the greater literary sibling that existed in embryo.")

Lee's collaboration with the new publication is viewed with skepticism by longtime Monroeville residents, like the Methodist minister, who says:

Nelle Lee had a stroke, she doesn't remember anything, she's essen-

tially blind, profoundly deaf and confined to a wheelchair.... You can draw your own conclusions. They'd probably be the same as mine.... I've known Miss Nelle since the 1980s and her sister since 1965 and no suggestion of another book had come to light before. It makes you wonder.

"My reaction?" says restaurant owner Sam Therrell, "disgust and disdain. I don't think that Nelle or Alice had any idea that it had even been written. I've no idea why people are being kept away from seeing Nelle."

Lee's London literary agent said that she was "feisty" when he saw her. She could no doubt resolve questions about her condition herself, but few are allowed by Carter to see her. Apparently alerted by a local doctor who had heard she was unresponsive after the death of Miss Alice in November 2014, the state of Alabama actually investigated her circumstances for "elder abuse," though no abuses were found.

Meantime in Poland, textual scholars with sophisticated computer algorithms had already gone to work on both *Mockingbird* and *Watchman* to check out rumors that Harper Lee's close childhood friend Truman Capote had written parts of Lee's novels. Their answer? Basically he hadn't; or maybe a little in parts; or else he had influenced her strongly at the end of *Mockingbird*; while *Go Set a Watchman* is all written by Lee. But any investigation is an implied challenge to the text and to Lee's authorship, since most literary works are not subjected to such analysis.

Given concerns about Lee's health and her intentions for this manuscript, the Polish data-mining prompts larger questions of authorship and authenticity. Did and does Harper Lee really want this manuscript to be published? Does its inferior quality somehow diminish her earlier accomplishment—questions asked of many posthumous publications, for instance certain Hemingway manuscripts? Is this a shameless exploitation for profit at the expense of her reputation, "one of the epic money grabs in the modern history of American publishing," as *The New York Times* has it? And have we correctly understood the social attitudes expressed in *Mockingbird*?

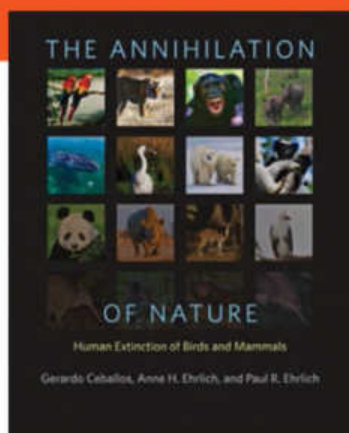
2.

It's easy to see in *Go Set a Watchman* the lineaments of the original work from which *To Kill a Mockingbird* was extracted. There is a classic frame, the prodigal daughter coming back to her hometown. Scout, now twenty-six and known by her grown-up name Jean Louise, comes home to Maycomb, Alabama, to visit her family after a few years in New York, as Harper Lee herself returned to Monroeville, Alabama. Scout's brother, Jem, has died (like Harper Lee's brother), and her beloved father Atticus is aging. All the events of small-town life unfold in a mostly normal fashion; she has a loyal suitor, there are relatives, and pranks, and friends who try to straighten out her

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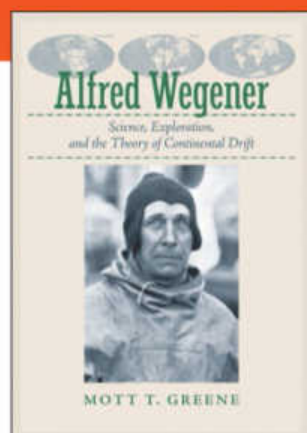


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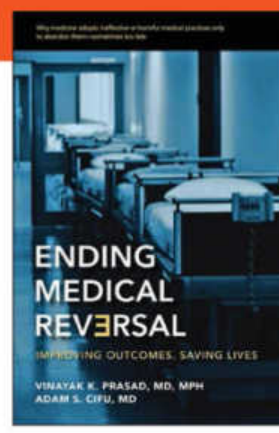


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life—but something has happened in Maycomb that she doesn't understand.

Above all, she doesn't understand the atmosphere of tension and stress, the harsh rhetoric, the new talk of "niggers," and "them." The historical setting is important: it's 1957. Since she was last home, the Supreme Court has outlawed school segregation, and the NAACP—one of the villains of the piece—has been stirring up the area, with the result that local attitudes, formerly ones of cordial coexistence, have hardened into frank racism among whites, and hostility from blacks.

She finds that even her own family members—her Aunt Alexandra, her uncle, and her admired father—as well as her boyfriend Hank now talk in ways she couldn't have imagined when she went off to New York a few years earlier. She's shocked that her father would tolerate the kind of ugly racist diatribe she hears from one of his associates at the Maycomb County Citizens' Council, a body that hadn't existed before.

The reader, used to more conventional scenarios in which enlightened northern liberals confront redneck southern bigots, may take awhile to catch on that Jean Louise's powerful reaction to her father's demeanor is the real emotional center of the novel. It is not driven by activist indignation so much as by disappointment at his betrayal of what she had viewed as his own values, and by her nostalgia for the South of her childhood, that is, of the 1930s, when a mood of racial harmony and accommodation, as far as it appeared to her childhood self, governed the peaceful communities southerners often reminisce about, back when people were nice, "they" weren't uppity, and everyone got along.

Watchman is set in the present of the 1950s; after Jean Louise arrives in Maycomb, the story flashes back to her childhood, the period covered in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Several long sequences—for instance, Scout getting her first menstrual period, or believing she must be pregnant because a boy has kissed her, or being kind to an ostracized white-trash boy—could be easily slotted back into *To Kill a Mockingbird* unaltered.

We also get complete sketches of Uncle Jack, Aunt Alexandra, and other characters, which might be notes by a conscientious writer for the novel she was preparing to write. Between the flashbacks, the action returns to the present, where the newly arrived Jean Louise has encounters with each of these important people in her life in set pieces about the town; about Atticus, the boyfriend Hank, her cherished aunt; about their former cook, Calpurnia. But Jean Louise finds that Calpurnia has left their service; at the instigation of the NAACP, the formerly docile, friendly, and dependent local black folks have turned distant and hostile; the Supreme Court has taken away the right of the community to manage things in the way it believed had worked for a long time; attitudes have hardened; things are said that never were said before. All is uncertainty and anxiety. Jean Louise is distressed, even revolted, especially when she attends the meeting of the citizens' council and realizes that one of the speakers, spouting vicious racist hate, is sitting with her father and Hank, who seem by their presence to condone it.

Lee has a fine disregard for certain conventions of storytelling, so we know

nothing about Scout's inner life except demonstrations of her childlike rage against the adults who disappoint her; disillusion becomes the emotional climax of the book. When she sees her father at the citizens' council, she is literally sick: her reaction to his toleration of his racist friends is to throw up in the yard of an ice cream place (and to let the white-trash owner clean it up). Because a few pages earlier we had read about the scare she'd had at age eleven, fearing pregnancy when a boy put his tongue in her mouth, and because, despite the phrase "that makes me sick," people rarely throw up when overhearing unpleasant things, in the overdetermined world of fiction our first thought is to wonder: Is Jean Louise pregnant? No, it's Lee overdramatizing inner revulsion. If Jean Louise had coughed,



Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch, James Anderson as Bob Ewell, and Paul Fix as Judge Taylor in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

we'd think she had tuberculosis.

Beside Jean Louise's thoughts, there are other unexplored matters. Lee is not comfortable with the subject of sex. How does Jean Louise feel when Hank kisses her? We don't know. She is a virginal twenty-six, shows no interest in marriage, and easily gives him up because of his unwise associations and lower-class origins. Her fate (like that of the Lee sisters) is of course to be that perennial small-town figure the old maid, the child who is sacrificed to be the caretaker of the parent. *Go Set a Watchman* alludes to this several times, as when Aunt Alexandra predicts that Jean Louise "would return and make her home with Atticus; that was what a daughter did, and she who did not was no daughter." Uncle Jack seems to expect it too when he tries to warn her that her worship of her father is misplaced.

3.

For bookish Yankee children, at least, the worlds of the Old South and of Olde England were invented, distant, and exotic. English stories gave us castles and vassals; the South, plantations, hoopskirts, and slaves. Harper Lee gives us both. To emphasize the timeless or out-of-time qualities of their little community—Jean Louise's Maycomb got its first paved street in 1936—she tells us that Anglophilia is a southern characteristic, and Uncle Jack maintains that the South is really an extension of England. Lee also tells us

that the Finch family often reads from nineteenth-century Anglican theology, for instance Bishop Colenso, who believed that God created the races separately, or his defender Dean Stanley. But there are also echoes of what was actually in the news while Lee was writing the story: Atticus is keeping up with the Alger Hiss case, and criticizes an English author for daring to write a book defending Whittaker Chambers.

On my bookshelf growing up, I had *Diddie, Dumps and Tot, or Plantation Child Life*, by Louise Clarke Pyrnelle, an enormously popular children's book, first published in 1886; my copy had belonged to my mother and possibly her mother. This book is so astonishingly un-PC that recently when I found an old copy, the bookstore owner, looking inside it, refused to sell it to me, shocked

the southern novel. Calpurnia is both vivid and familiar from many other novels and films: we can all see Hattie McDaniel in the role, or Aunt Jemima on the pancake mix. In *Diddie, Dumps and Tot*, the Calpurnia figure is predictably called Mammy. (Faulkner has many—Callie, Dilsey, Elmora, Clytie, and more.) Other stock characters turn up, too: the shuffling blacks, the vicious white racist—the redneck Bob Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mr. Grady O'Hanlon in *Go Set a Watchman*; there's usually a judicious white male authority figure, often with an honorific title like Colonel, Major, or Judge, here represented by both Atticus and Uncle Jack—Doctor Finch. The character of dumb southern belle is played by Jean Louise herself: "I don't know much about government and economics and all that, and I don't want to know much, but I do know that the Federal Government to me, one small citizen," is bureaucracy, inefficiency, insensitivity, and meddling. Jean Louise believes in states' rights and mistrusts all government institutions including the local Methodist vestry.

The text of *Go Set a Watchman* is strangely mined with violence—nouns and verbs of combat and death:

She could have added another scalp to her belt, but after years of tactical study Jean Louise knew her enemy. Although she could rout her...the last time she skirmished with Alexandra was when her brother died.

The writing throughout feels like what it clearly was, the unmediated responses of an observant young aspiring author who, having gone to try her luck in New York, comes home to Alabama for a visit and notices things with new eyes, circumstances almost identical to the ones she then puts in her novel: the real Harper Lee had a brother who died of an aneurysm, a lawyer father, a Methodist minister, and so on. The reader doesn't doubt that Mr. Lee, like Mr. Finch, was actually reading about the Hiss case when his daughter took note of it.

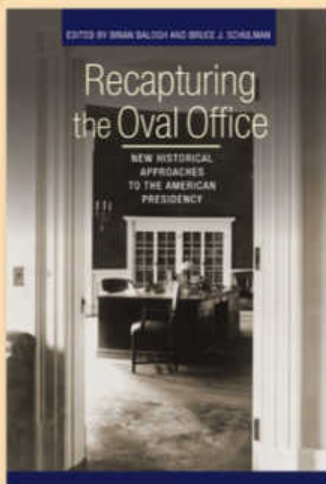
4.

It's the change in the character of Atticus that readers have found shocking. The mistaking of a literary character "Atticus" for an actual, inspiring figure is strange in itself. We might read about Gandhi in a book and be inspired to a moral or nonviolent life, but this depends on us knowing that the character on the page is the representation of a living person. Atticus, no doubt because he was incarnated by Gregory Peck, seems to have been taken as an actual person, too, and people are outraged to learn his real views, and his condescension to and exasperation with blacks. Jean Louise herself was appalled:

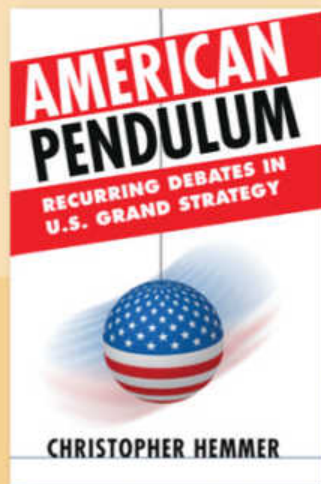
The man who could not be discourteous to a ground squirrel had sat in the courthouse abetting the cause of grubby-minded little men. Many times she had seen him in the grocery store waiting his turn in line behind Negroes and God knows what.

Now he was saying things like "Do you want Negroes by the carload

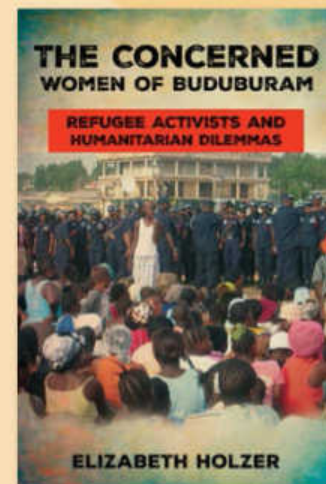
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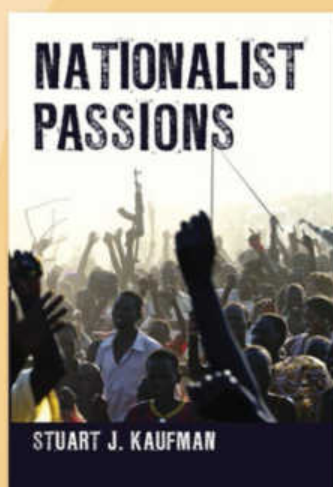
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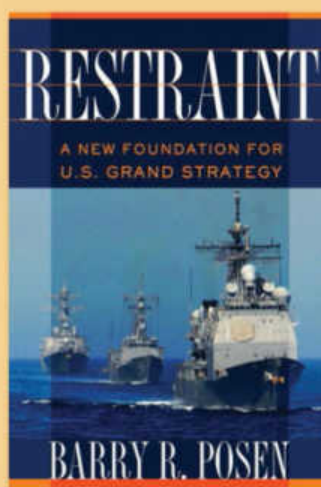
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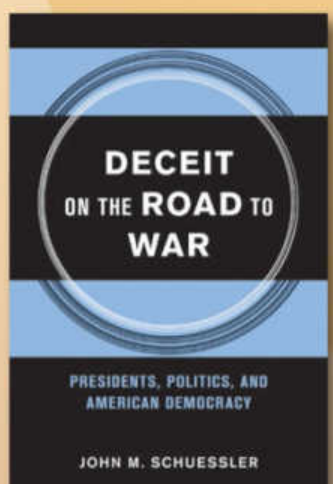
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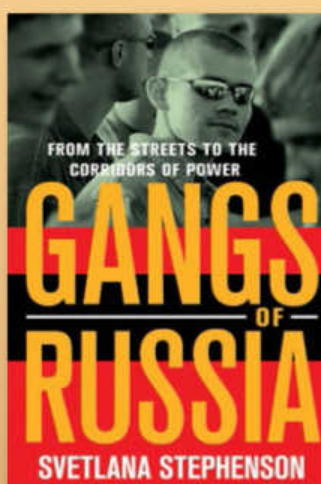
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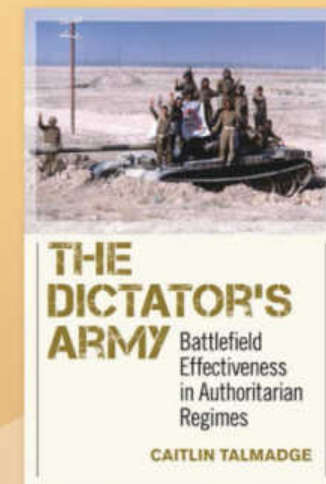
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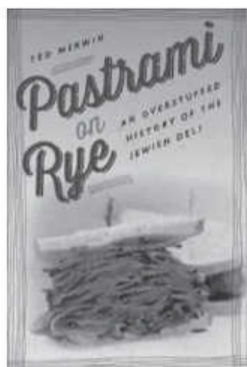


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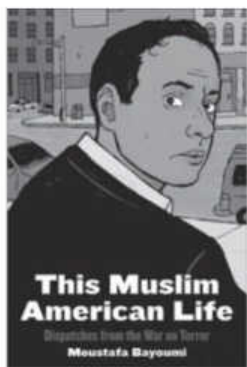
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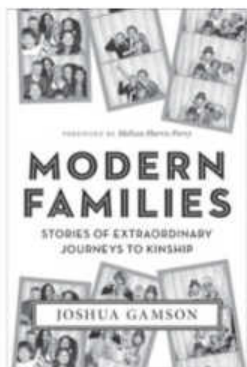
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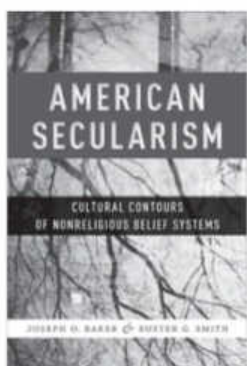
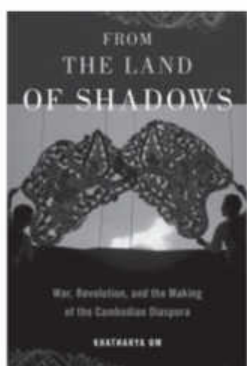
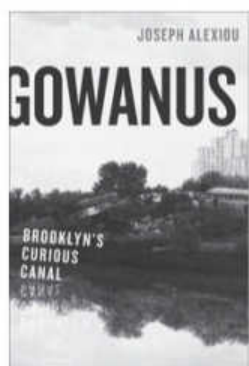
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in our schools and churches and theaters?"

Looking back at *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we can see that even in that book Atticus was defined more by old-fashioned rectitude than by today's ideas about civil rights. His handsome though preachy and sententious defense of our common humanity and the rule of law has changed in the sequel to what he takes to be wary realism: "Honey, you do not seem to understand that the Negroes down here are still in their childhood as a people."

To be shocked by ideas expressed by Atticus in *Go Set a Watchman* is really to perceive the mind of the author, who is in this case evidently reporting what lots of people in the 1950s in Monroeville, Alabama, said; things probably said in California and New York too, without the excuse of local history: "You realize that our Negro population is backward, don't you?"

Jean Louise, full of fine indignation at hearing racist talk, compares her father and other white locals to Hitler, and thinks herself more enlightened. But she expresses her unconscious sense of noblesse oblige when she tells us that her father is a hero because he consents to wait his turn in line with black people. "They are simple people, most of them, but that doesn't make them sub-human," she thinks. Lee's own views are to be found thus embedded deeply in the vocabulary of the work: "She followed him into a dark parlor to which clung the musky sweet smell of clean Negro, snuff, and Hearts of Love hair-dressing." "Which boy was this one? He was in real dutch this time, he needed real help and what do they do but sit in the kitchen and talk NAACP...."

What Jean Louise turns out to long for is not exactly racial equality or even equal opportunity, it's the peaceful co-existence that she felt used to exist before the NAACP meddled, when reliably upstanding figures like her father could be counted on to do the right thing, Calpurnia was there in her place, car-

ing and trustworthy, and there was an understanding between the two races that seemed to the white people, at least, to be working fine. Now, seeing Atticus in *Go Set a Watchman* helping another poor black client for free, Jean Louise deplores the ingratitude of the black people: "Who were the people Calpurnia's tribe turned to first and always? How many divorces had Atticus gotten for Zeebo? Five, at least." Though she's all for equality and human dignity, and believes she's color-blind, she also thinks the Supreme Court has no right to tell Alabamans how to run their schools:

It seemed that to meet the real needs of a small portion of the population [blacks], the Court set up something horrible that could—that could affect the vast majority of folks. Adversely, that is. Atticus, I don't know anything about it—all we have is the Constitution between us and anything some smart fellow wants to start, and there went the Court just breezily canceling one whole amendment, it seemed to me.

She's talking about the Tenth Amendment, which establishes states' rights. Most shockingly, it is made plain that both *Watchman* and *Mockingbird* are not pleading a case for civil rights as we normally understand them, but instead for a return to the kinder, gentler times that privileged people like the Finches enjoyed before the civil rights movement and the interference of the Supreme Court. Jean Louise reproaches people like her father for not having treated African-Americans better, which would have forestalled all this: "Has anybody, in all the wrangling and high words over states' rights and what kind of government we should have, thought about helping the Negroes?" But for her the truly upsetting thing is the discovery that Daddy isn't perfect. □

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Flickering your eyes, drumming your heart,
Here and gone before you blink.
You walk airborne toward the start.

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It's dripping out of a swimming pool onto hot-under-your-feet.

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And the American Hotel porch where you'll eat.

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“The Trainers”: An alien race that saved humans from extinction is now raising those humans for food, using the same justifications we use with animals.

What continued to amaze Ambio was the tyranny of the body, the way the pure physicality of the Universe had defeated so many of the dreams that intelligent life forms had conjured up. There’d been human philosophers who—like early Amorphan philosophers—had dreamed of spirit breaking the bonds of the body and evolving into other dimensions. But it was not to be. It was amazing and disappointing the way the appetites and passions of the body remained insistent even in higher life forms, limiting evolution.

It seemed that even an advanced civilization would have to struggle to evolve while dragging the body along like a great weight. Still, who’d have thought that a civilization as far along as the Amorphans would even now want... Well, there was no point in dwelling on it.

Ambio looked out across the gray ocean in the direction from which the freighter would come. Somewhere out there were the green islands where humans still existed, thanks to the intervention of the Amorphans. Human life had been saved. Though, of course, salvation always comes at a price.

ETHICAL DISCUSSIONS IN PROSE YOU’LL WANT TO READ

ON ANIMALS AND HUMAN EMBRYOS:

A friend who attended an animal rights conference told me about a woman who was affectionately dubbed “The Chicken Lady” for her crusade on behalf of factory-farmed chickens. One can imagine the Chicken Lady making her pitch to some pro-life people and having the pro-life people think: “Is she nuts? Chickens?! We are talking about human beings!”

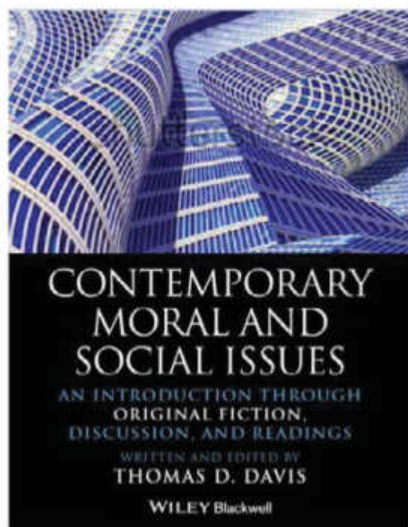
The Chicken Lady might respond indignantly that her chickens, unlike their embryos, have independent lives and can feel pain.

ON ETIQUETTE VERSUS MORALITY:

Rules of etiquette resemble rules of morality in governing human interactions, and some violations of etiquette can result in shame, or at least embarrassment. Certainly there are people to whom etiquette and fashion seem all-consuming. No doubt there are many hosts who would rather have as a guest someone who was convicted of fraud than someone who slurps his soup. However, most of us would agree that our most important moral rules supersede our most important rules of etiquette and fashion.

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Fear

Marilynne Robinson

America is a Christian country. This is true in a number of senses. Most people, if asked, will identify themselves as Christian, which may mean only that they aren't something else. Non-Christians will say America is Christian, meaning that they feel somewhat apart from the majority culture. There are a large number of demographic Christians in North America because of our history of immigration from countries that are or were also Christian. We are identified in the world at large with this religion because some of us espouse it not only publicly but also vociferously. As a consequence, we carry a considerable responsibility for its good name in the world, though we seem not much inclined to consider the implications of this fact. If we did, some of us might think a little longer about associating the precious Lord with ignorance, intolerance, and belligerent nationalism. These few simple precautions would also make it more attractive to the growing numbers among our people who have begun to reject it as ignorant, intolerant, and belligerently nationalistic, as they might reasonably conclude that it is, if they hear only the loudest voices.

There is something I have felt the need to say, that I have spoken about in various settings, extemporaneously, because my thoughts on the subject have not been entirely formed, and because it is painful to me to have to express them. However, my thesis is always the same, and it is very simply stated, though it has two parts: first, contemporary America is full of fear. And second, fear is not a Christian habit of mind. As children we learn to say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." We learn that, after his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Christ is a gracious, abiding presence in all reality, and in him history will finally be resolved.

These are larger, more embracing terms than contemporary Christianity is in the habit of using. But we are taught that Christ "was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.... The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." The present tense here is to be noted. John's First Letter proclaims "the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us." We as Christians cannot think of Christ as isolated in space or time if we really do accept the authority of our own texts. Nor can we imagine that this life on earth is our only life, our primary life. As Christians we are to believe that we are to fear not the death of our bodies but the loss of our souls.

We hear a great deal now about the drift of America away from a Christian identity. Whenever there is talk of decline—as in fact there always is—the one thing that seems to be lacking is a meaningful standard of change. How can we know where we are if we don't know where we were, in those days when things were as they ought to be?

How can we know there has been decline, an invidious qualitative change, if we cannot establish a terminus a quo? I propose attention to the marked and oddly general fearfulness of our culture at present as one way of dealing with the problem. In the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus we find a description of the state the people of Israel will find themselves in if they depart from their loyalty to God: "The sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight, and they shall flee as one flees from the sword, and they shall fall when none pursues. They shall stumble over one another, as if to escape a sword, though none pursues."



Tucson, Arizona, 2011; photograph by Paolo Pellegrin

Now, of course, there are numbers among us who have weapons that would blast that leaf to atoms, and feel brave as they did it, confirmed in their alarm by the fact that there are so very many leaves. But the point is the same. Those who forget God, the single assurance of our safety however that word may be defined, can be recognized in the fact that they make irrational responses to irrational fears. The text specifies the very real threat that fear itself poses—"you shall have no power to stand before your enemies." There are always real dangers in the world, sufficient to their day. Fearfulness obscures the distinction between real threat on one hand and on the other the terrors that beset those who see threat everywhere. It is clear enough, to an objective viewer at least, with whom one would choose to share a crisis, whose judgment should be trusted when sound judgment is most needed.

Granting the perils of the world, it is potentially a very costly indulgence to fear indiscriminately, and to try to stimulate fear in others, just for the excitement of it, or because to do so channels anxiety or loneliness or prejudice or resentment into an emotion that can seem to those who indulge it like shrewdness or courage or patriotism. But no one seems to have an unkind word to say about fear these days, un-Christian as it surely is.

We who are students of Calvin's tradition know that our ancestors in the tradition did not spare their lives or their fortunes. They were loyal to the will of God as they understood it at the

most extreme cost to themselves—in worldly terms, that is. They also defended their faith militarily, with intelligence and great courage, but without ultimate success, except in the Low Countries. Therefore the migration of Pilgrims and Puritans, and Huguenots as well, and the great flourishing of Calvinist civilization in the New World. We might say that the oppressors meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, except this might lead us to forget a crucial thing, a factor not present in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Those oppressors were motivated by fear of us. We were heretics

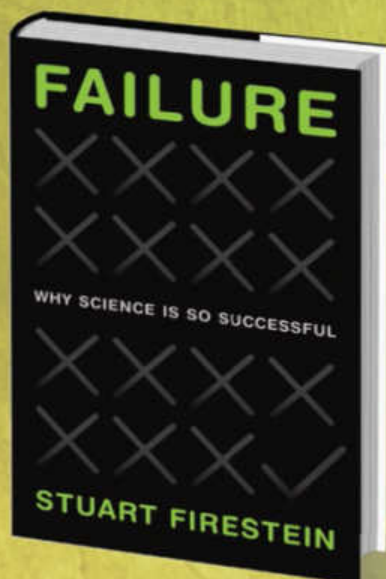
notable rigor and persistence, and with great effect.

I spoke not long ago at a homiletics conference in Wittenberg. There were people there from many distant parts of the world, and not a soul from France. I asked why there were no French people there, and was told that Catholics were not as focused on preaching as Protestants. I told them there are in fact Protestants in France. I told them how to find the Église Réformée on the Internet, preaching and music and all. I am aware of them myself because no Christian population anywhere has ever defended its beliefs with more courage against more entrenched persecution than the Protestants of France. These cultural erasures are almost always more apparent than real, and still they matter, because they assert the unique legitimacy of one descriptor, narrowly defined—Roman, or French, or Aryan, or Catholic, or Christian, or American.

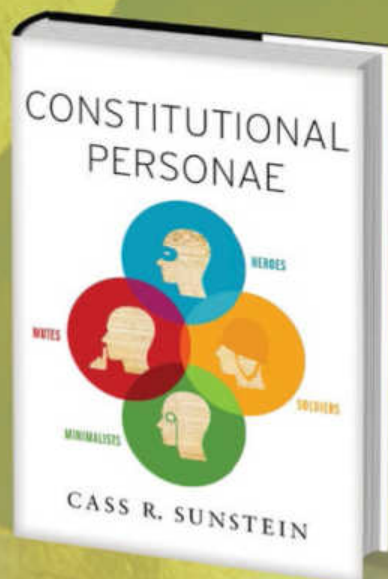
It is difficult for any number of reasons to define a religion, to establish an essence and a circumference, and this is true not least because it always has its supernumeraries, often legions of them. I saw a cinema spectacular when I was growing up, *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, directed by Delmer Daves. Demetrius, who bore an uncanny resemblance to Victor Mature, was a Christian convert, obliged therefore to turn the other cheek when taunted by a bully. A gladiator acquaintance of his, an enormous Nubian man, walloped the bully with a plated forearm, sending him sprawling, then growled after him, exultingly, "I am no Christian!" Needless to say, the theater audience erupted in cheers. There was popcorn all over the place. (Parenthetically: I watched this film and *The Robe*, directed by Henry Koster, to see if I had been fair to Koster and Daves, and I had not. Both represent the Christian community as gentle and serene, startlingly so by our standards. But then, in those early days Christians had only such emperors as Caligula to worry about.)

Calvin had his supernumeraries, great French lords who were more than ready to take up arms in his cause, which was under severe persecution. He managed to restrain them while he lived, saying that the first drop of blood they shed would become a torrent that drowned France. And, after he died, Europe was indeed drenched in blood. So there is every reason to suppose that Calvin would have thought his movement had lost at least as much as it gained in these efforts to defend it, as he anticipated it would. Specifically, in some degree it lost its Christian character, as Christianity, or any branch of it, always does when its self-proclaimed supporters outnumber and outshout its actual adherents. What is true when there is warfare is just as true when the bonding around religious identity is militantly cultural or political.

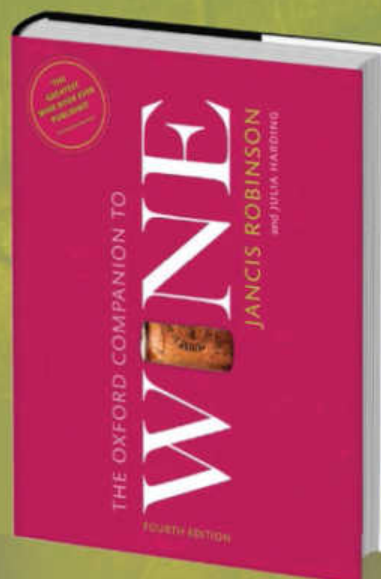
At the core of all this is fear, real or pretended. What if these dissenters in our midst really are a threat to all we hold dear? Better to deal with the problem before their evil schemes are irreversible, before our country has lost



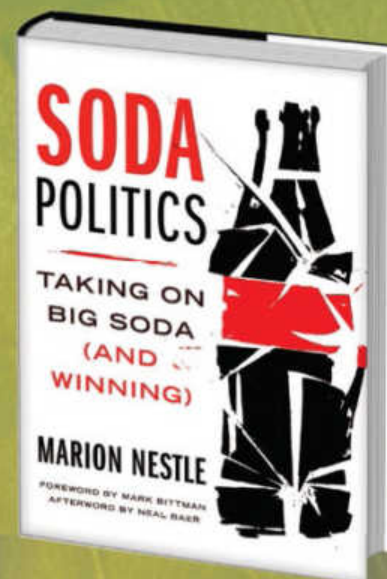
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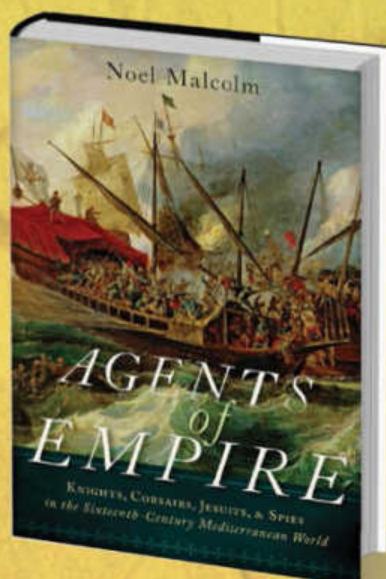
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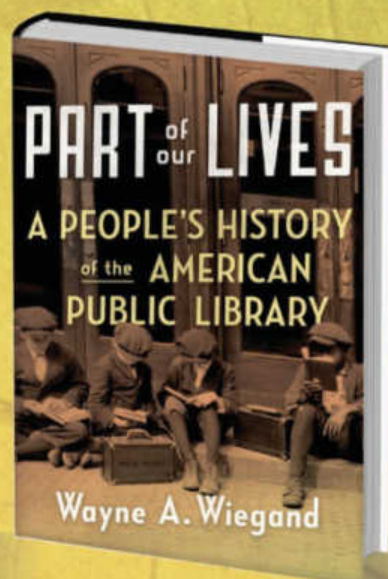
—Alice Waters, Founder and Proprietor of Chez Panisse

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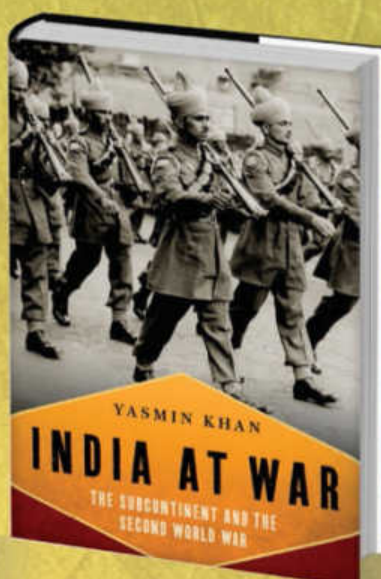
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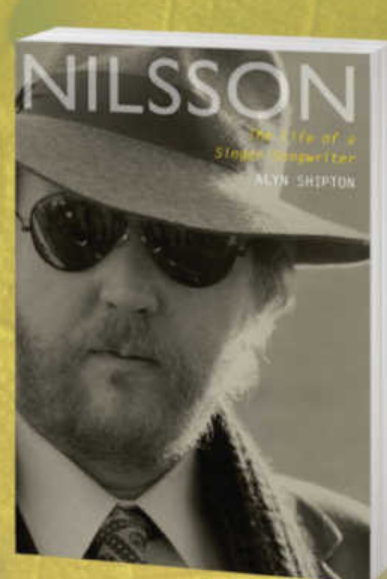
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its soul and the United Nations has invaded Texas. We might step back and say that there are hundreds of millions of people who love this nation's soul, who in fact are its soul, and patriotism should begin by acknowledging this fact. But there is not much fear to be enjoyed from this view of things. Why stockpile ammunition if the people over the horizon are no threat? If they would in fact grieve with your sorrows and help you through your troubles?

At a lunch recently Lord Jonathan Sacks, then chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, said that the United States is the world's only covenant nation, that the phrase "We the People" has no equivalent in the political language of other nations, and that the State of the Union Address should be called the renewal of the covenant. I have read that Americans are now buying Kalashnikovs in numbers sufficient to help subsidize Russian rearmament, to help their manufacturers achieve economies of scale. In the old days these famous weapons were made with the thought that they would be used in a land war between great powers, that is, that they would kill Americans. Now, since they are being brought into this country, the odds are great that they will indeed kill Americans. But only those scary ones who want to destroy all we hold dear. Or, more likely, assorted adolescents in a classroom or a movie theater.

I know there are any number of people who collect guns as sculpture, marvels of engineering. When we mount a cross on a wall, we don't do it with the thought that, in a pinch, we might crucify someone. This seems to be a little different when the icon in question is a gun. A "civilian" Kalashnikov can easily be modified into a weapon that would blast a deer to smithereens. That's illegal, of course, and unsportsmanlike. I have heard the asymmetry rationalized thus: deer can't shoot back. Neither can adolescents in a movie theater, of course. Neither can anyone not prepared for mayhem to break loose anywhere, at any time. And, imagining an extremely improbable best case, it is very hard to threaten or deter someone who is suicidal, as most of these assailants are. Gun sales stimulate gun sales—a splendid business model, no doubt about that. Fear operates as an appetite or an addiction. You can never be safe enough.

I know that hunting is sacrosanct in this country. This is beside the point, since hunting rifles are not the problem. And the conversation around this issue never stays long with hunting. It goes instead to the Second Amendment. Any literalist reading would notice the founders' words "well-regulated" on one hand, and on the other the alarm that arises among the pro-gun people at the slightest mention of anything that resembles regulation, and their constant efforts to erode what little regulation there is. The supposed neglect or abuse of this revered document, and the supposed "defense of the Second Amendment," is leveraged on that other fear, the fear that those bland blue helmets might be gathering even now, maybe in Canada, to commence their internationalist march into the heart of Texas. Will we wake to find ourselves betrayed by our own government!! Maybe nothing has deterred them to this point but those Kalashnikovs. How fortunate that the factory in Russia is up and running. And how hard those Russians must be laughing, all the way to the bank. And all those

homicidal insurgents and oppressors in the turbulent parts of the world, how pleased they must be that we cheapen these marvelous weapons for them. Oh, I know there are all sorts of reliable gun manufacturers, in Austria, for example. Our appetite for weapons is one of those vacuums nature hates, that is to say, fills.

The Second Amendment argument is brilliant in its way, because the Constitution is central to everything American. The president takes an oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution—nothing more, nothing other. I took a rather similar oath myself once, when I accepted a generous fellowship of a kind established under President Eisenhower and continued under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. But of course J. Edgar Hoover identified Dwight Eisenhower as a Communist sympathizer. I guess he would cite me as proof, since I did indeed study Shakespeare with the sponsorship of the federal government, on a National Defense Education Act fellowship. I flatter myself that we are no worse for it.

The government at that time felt that humanists also contributed to the well-being of the United States. How times change. I have in fact a number of credentials that would make me a driven leaf, as things are reckoned now. I have lived in Massachusetts and other foreign countries. My command of French is not absolutely minimal. I have degrees from elite institutions. I am a professor in a secular university. All in all I am a pretty good example of the sort who inspire fight-or-flight responses in certain segments of the population. I find myself musing over this from time to time.

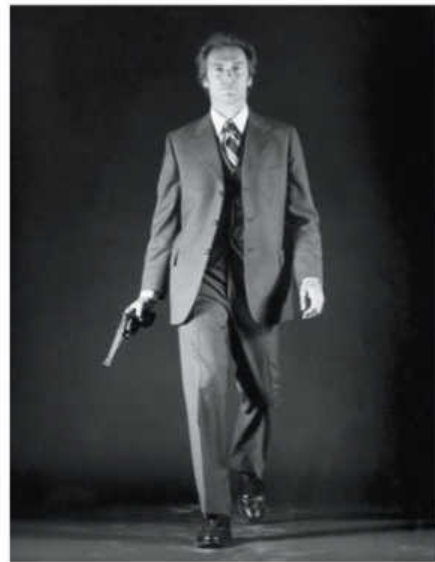
Be that as it may. Our first loyalty in this country is to the Constitution, so if the case can be made that any part of the Bill of Rights, for heaven's sake, is under threat, then the whole edifice is imperiled. And what is a patriot to do in the face of such peril? Carry, as they say, just to assert the right. In the old movies a concealed weapon was the unfailing mark of a coward, but Clint Eastwood came along to rescue us from our scruples about such things. And besides, a visible weapon would not only spoil the lines of a business suit, it would also alarm and no doubt alienate anyone who watches the news.

By pure coincidence, as I was writing these thoughts, sitting on my back porch in my quiet, crime-free neighborhood, I heard one man loudly lecturing another on the inappropriateness of going armed into a grocery store, telling him that if he did he could expect the manager to call the police, and that when the police ordered him to leave he was indeed obliged to leave. Do I feel safer in my neighborhood because this unknown man is wandering around with a gun, licensed though it seems to be? No I don't. Since everything is economics these days, what would it cost a store in terms of trade if word got out that he frequented it, with his loyalty to the Second Amendment on display? Or possibly concealed? I'm betting he could put them out of business, because when people see weapons, they have every reason on earth to fear the worst. And what does it cost to police this sort of thing, in this time of budget cuts? If there is any argument for weapons from a public safety point of view, there is a much stronger argument for sparing the police the problem of dealing with

such distractions, and for minimizing the risk of their killing or being killed by someone they must assume to be armed.

So, concealed carry. The gun lobby has made its product socially acceptable by putting it out of sight, issues of cowardice notwithstanding.

The next thing to do is to stockpile weapons. Buy gold from that man on TV, maybe some of that dried food, too. Prowl around in the woods with people who share your views. Some pretty intense bonding goes on, swapping fears around a campfire, as any girl scout can testify. And keep an eye out for traitors, active or passive, intentional or not. Who can say, after all, that the Christians did not turn the gods against Rome, that the Cathars did not kill souls, that witches did not cast spells, that Jews did not poison wells, that



Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry in *The Enforcer*, 1976

Gypsies did not steal infants, that a Republican president did not send English majors to graduate school as part of a scheme to soften the national resolve? It is notoriously impossible to prove a negative. I think the army of the United Nations is invoked in these cases as a small and rare concession to standards of plausibility. No one would imagine such a thing of the United States Army. Other plausibility issues arise, of course. To the best of my knowledge, the forces of the United Nations exist primarily to be ineffectual in hopeless situations. Never mind. They are an ominous threat. We might need to shoot at them.

This is the point at which that supernumerary phenomenon I mentioned becomes a factor. There is a First Amendment, too, and it is directed toward, among other things, forbidding an establishment of religion. Yet among the self-declared Constitution-alists the word "Christian" has become the kind of test for electoral eligibility that the founders specifically meant to forbid. Is Mitt Romney a Christian? Mormonism has a pretty exotic theology, after all. Is Barack Obama a Christian? He adopted Christianity as an adult, true, having been unaffiliated with institutional religion until then, but the whole history of the Spanish Inquisition proves how hard some people find it to trust a convert. There was a time when we Calvinists felt the force of the terror and antagonism that can be raised against those who are not Christian in a sense other people are willing to accept. This doleful trait is being played upon in our current politics. Supernumeraries who strike out

against the free exercise of religion might say, "I am no Christian." With equal truth they might also say, "I am no American." And a pretty large part of the crowd would probably cheer.

I defer to no one in my love for America and for Christianity. I have devoted my life to the study of both of them. I have tried to live up to my association with them. And I take very seriously Jesus's teachings, in this case his saying that those who live by the sword will also die by the sword. Something called Christianity has become entangled in exactly the strain of nationalism that is militaristic, ready to spend away the lives of our young, and that can only understand dissent from its views as a threat or a defection, a heresy in the most alienating and stigmatizing sense of the word. We are not the first country where this has happened. The fact that it was the usual thing in Europe, and had been for many centuries, was one great reason for attempting to separate church and state here.

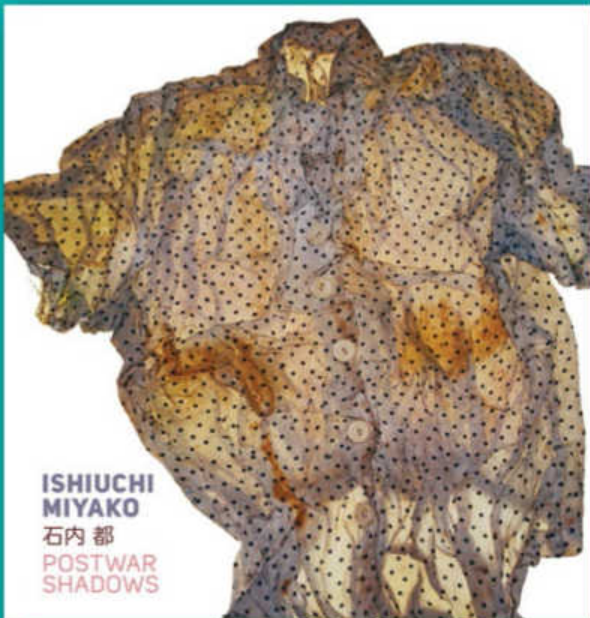
Jesus's aphorism may be taken to mean simply that those who deal in violence are especially liable to suffer violence. True enough. But death is no simple thing when Jesus speaks of it. His thoughts are not our thoughts, the limits of our perceptions are not limits he shares. We must imagine him seeing the whole of our existence, our being beyond mortality, beyond time. There is that other death he can foresee, the one that really matters. When Christians abandon Christian standards of behavior in the defense of Christianity, when Americans abandon American standards of conduct in the name of America, they inflict harm that would not be in the power of any enemy. As Christians they risk the kind of harm to themselves to which the Bible applies adjectives like "everlasting."

American exceptionalism is more imperiled in these moments than in any others, and so is organized religion. Try to persuade a skeptic of the value of religion, and he or she will mention some horror of European history carried out under the sign of the cross. They are innumerable. I have mentioned St. Bartholomew's Day. One hears of the secularization of Europe, often in the context of socialist economics, rarely in the context of a frankly terrifying history. We must be very careful not to defeat the safeguards our laws and traditions have put in place. Christian "establishment," the making of Christianity in effect the official religion, is the first thing its supernumeraries would try for, and the last thing its faithful should condone.

As for America, we have a way of plunging into wars we weary of and abandon after a few years and a few thousand casualties, having forgotten what our object was; these wars demonstrate an overwhelming power to destroy without any comparable regard to life and liberty, to the responsibilities of power, that would be consistent with maintaining our good name. We throw away our status in the world at the urging of those who think it has nothing to do with our laws and institutions, impressed by the zeal of those supernumeraries who are convinced that it all comes down to shock and awe and boots on the ground. This notion of glory explains, I suppose, some part of the fantasizing, the make-believe wars against make-believe enemies, and a great many of the very real Kalashnikovs. □

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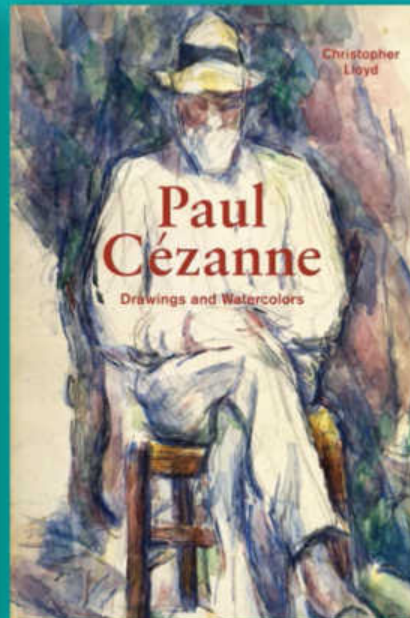


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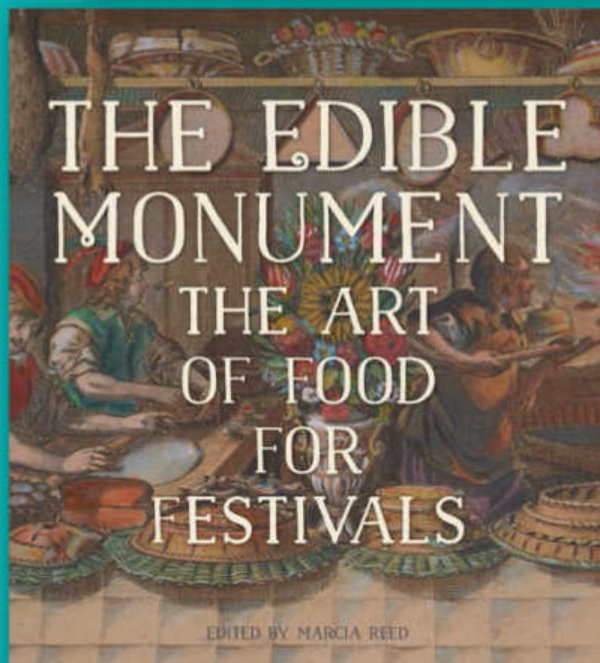


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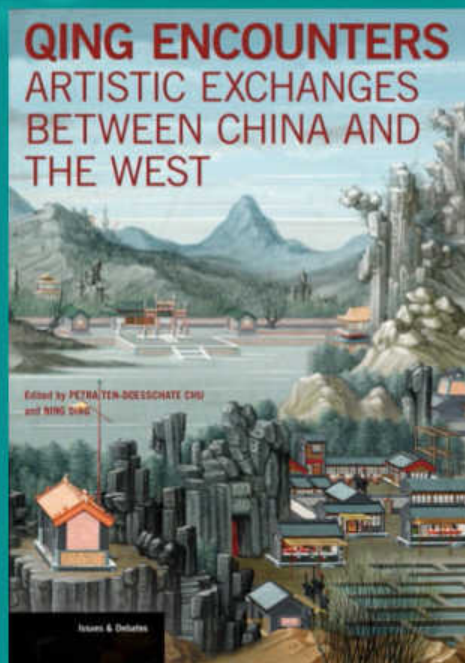


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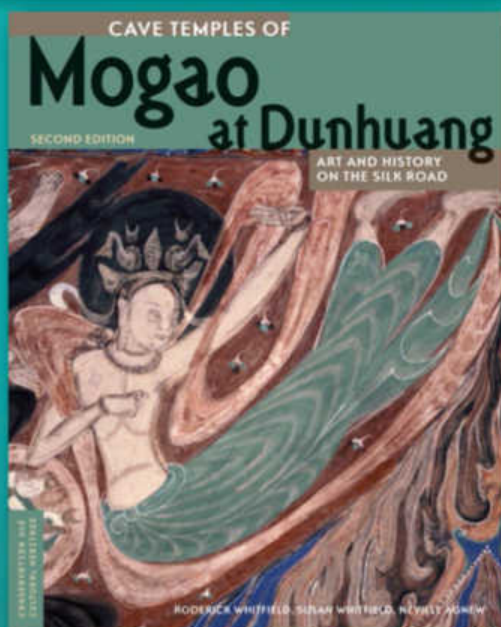


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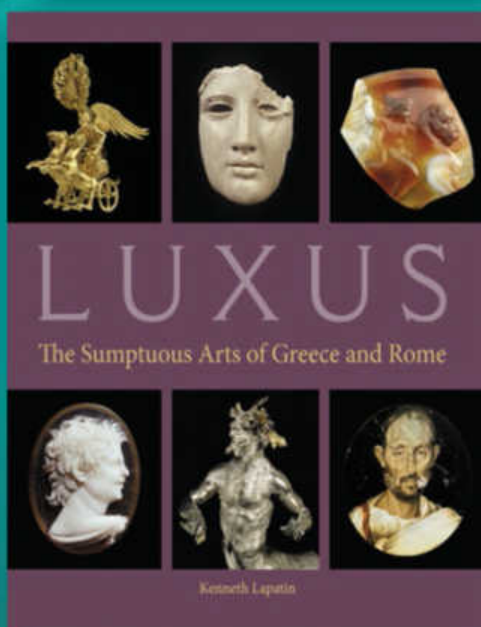


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The fundamental truth about American economic growth today is that while the work is done by many, the real rewards largely go to the few. The numbers are, at this point, woefully familiar: the top one percent of earners take home more than 20 percent of the income, and their share has more than doubled in the last thirty-five years. The gains for people in the top 0.1 percent, meanwhile, have been even greater. Yet over that same period, average wages and household incomes in the US have risen only slightly, and a number of demographic groups (like men with only a high school education) have actually seen their average wages decline.

Income inequality has become such an undeniable problem, in fact, that even Republican politicians have taken to decrying its effects. It's not surprising that a Democrat like Barack Obama would call dealing with inequality "the defining challenge of our time." But when Jeb Bush's first big policy speech of 2015 spoke of the frustration that Americans feel at seeing "only a small portion of the population riding the economy's up escalator," it was a sign that inequality had simply become too obvious, and too harmful, to be ignored.

Something similar has happened in economics. Historically, inequality was not something that academic economists, at least in the dominant neoclassical tradition, worried much about. Economics was about production and allocation, and the efficient use of scarce resources. It was about increasing the size of the pie, not figuring out how it should be divided. Indeed, for many economists, discussions of equity were seen as perilous, because there was assumed to be a necessary "tradeoff" between efficiency and equity: tinkering with the way the market divided the pie would end up making the pie smaller. As the University of Chicago economist Robert Lucas put it, in an oft-cited quote: "Of the tendencies that are harmful to sound economics, the most seductive, and... the most poisonous, is to focus on questions of distribution."

Today, the landscape of economic debate has changed. Inequality was at the heart of the most popular economics book in recent memory, the

economist Thomas Piketty's *Capital*. The work of Piketty and his colleague Emmanuel Saez has been instrumental in documenting the rise of income inequality, not just in the US but around the world. Major economic institutions, like the IMF and the OECD, have published studies arguing that inequality, far from enhancing economic growth, actually damages it. And it's now easy to find discussions of the subject in academic journals.

All of which makes this an ideal moment for the Columbia economist Joseph Stiglitz. In the years since the financial crisis, Stiglitz has been among the loudest and most influential public intellectuals decrying the costs of inequality, and making the case for how we can use government policy to deal with it. In his 2012 book, *The Price of Inequality*, and in a series of articles and Op-Eds for *Project Syndicate*, *Vanity Fair*, and *The New York Times*, which have now been collected in *The Great Divide*, Stiglitz has made the case that the rise in inequality in the US, far from being the natural outcome of market forces, has been profoundly shaped by "our policies and our politics," with disastrous effects on society and the economy as a whole. In a recent report for the Roosevelt Institute called *Rewriting the Rules*, Stiglitz has laid out a detailed list of reforms that he argues will make it possible to create "an economy that works for everyone."

Stiglitz's emergence as a prominent critic of the current economic order was no surprise. His original Ph.D. thesis was on inequality. And his entire career in academia has been devoted to showing how markets cannot always be counted on to produce ideal results. In a series of enormously important papers, for which he would eventually win the Nobel Prize, Stiglitz showed how imperfections and asymmetries of information regularly lead markets to results that do not maximize welfare. He also argued that this meant, at least in theory, that well-placed government interventions could help correct these market failures. Stiglitz's work in this field has continued: he has just written (with Bruce Greenwald) *Creating a Learning Society*, a dense academic work on how government policy can help drive innovation in the age of the knowledge economy.

Stiglitz served as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Clinton administration, and then was the chief economist at the World Bank during the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. His experience there convinced him of the folly of much of the advice that Western economists had given developing countries, and in books like *Globalization and Its Discontents* (2002) he offered up a sting-



Joseph Stiglitz with Christine Lagarde,
Paris, September 2009

ing critique of the way the US has tried to manage globalization, a critique that made him a cult hero in much of the developing world. In a similar vein, Stiglitz has been one of the fiercest critics of the way the Eurozone has handled the Greek debt crisis, arguing that the so-called troika's ideological commitment to austerity and its opposition to serious debt relief have deepened Greece's economic woes and raised the prospect that that country could face "depression without end." For Stiglitz, the fight over Greece's future isn't just about the right policy. It's also about "ideology and power." That perspective has also been crucial to his work on inequality.

The Great Divide presents that work in Stiglitz's most popular—and most populist—voice. While Piketty's *Capital* is written in a cool, dispassionate tone, *The Great Divide* is clearly intended as a political intervention, and its tone is often impassioned and angry. As a collection of columns, *The Great Divide* is somewhat fragmented and repetitive, but it has a clear thesis, namely that inequality in the US is not an unfortunate by-product of a well-functioning economy. Instead, the enormous riches at the top of the income ladder are largely the result of the ability of the one percent to manipulate markets and the political process

to their own benefit. (Thus, the title of his best-known *Vanity Fair* piece: "Of the 1 percent, by the 1 percent, for the 1 percent.") Soaring inequality is a sign that American capitalism itself has gone woefully wrong. Indeed, Stiglitz argues, what we're stuck with isn't really capitalism at all, but rather an "ersatz" version of the system.

Inequality obviously has no single definition. As Stiglitz writes:

There are so many different parts to America's inequality: the extremes of income and wealth at the top, the hollowing out of the middle, the increase of poverty at the bottom. Each has its own causes, and needs its own remedies.

But in *The Great Divide*, Stiglitz is mostly interested in one dimension of inequality: the gap between the people at the very top and everyone else. And his analysis of that gap concentrates on the question of why incomes at the top have risen so sharply, rather than why the incomes of everyone else have stagnated. While Stiglitz obviously recognizes the importance of the decline in union power, the impact of globalization on American workers, and the shrinking value of the minimum wage, his preoccupation here is primarily with why the rich today are so much richer than they used to be.

To answer that question, you have to start by recognizing that the rise of high-end incomes in the US is still largely about labor income rather than capital income. Piketty's book is, as the title suggests, largely about capital: about the way the concentration of wealth tends to reproduce itself, leading to greater and greater inequality. And this is an increasing problem in the US, particularly at the highest reaches of the income spectrum. But the main reason people at the top are so much richer these days than they once were (and so much richer than everyone else) is not that they own so much more capital: it's that they get paid much more for their work than they once did, while everyone else gets paid about the same, or less. Corporate CEOs, for instance, are paid far more today than they were in the 1970s, while assembly line workers aren't. And while incomes at the top have risen in countries around the world, nowhere have they risen faster than in the US.

One oft-heard justification of this phenomenon is that the rich get paid so much more because they are creating so much more value than they once did. Globalization and technology have increased the size of the markets that successful companies and individuals (like pop singers or athletes) can reach,

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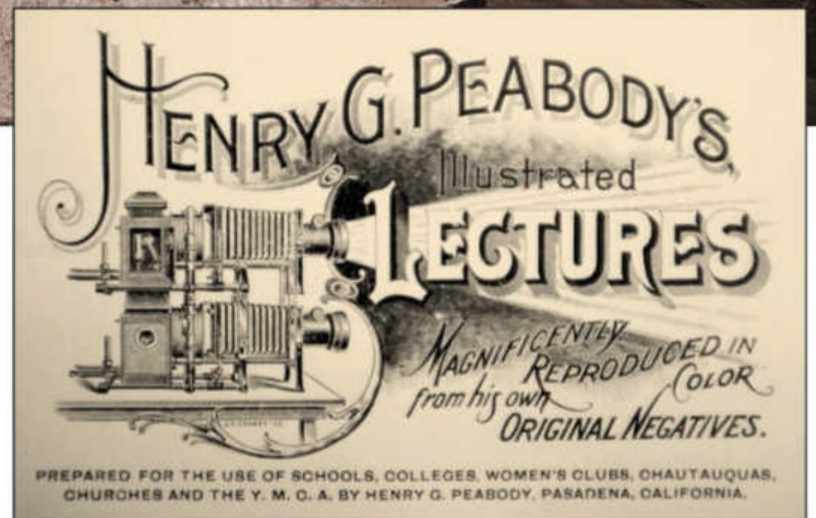
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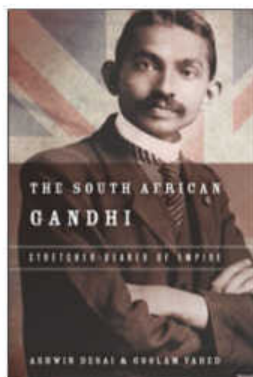
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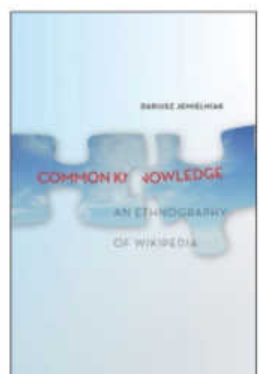
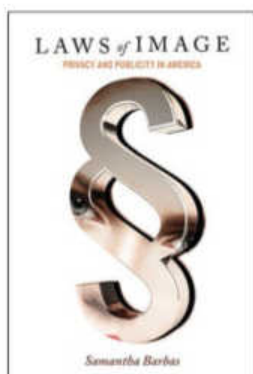
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so that being a superstar is more valuable than ever. And as companies have gotten bigger, the potential value that CEOs can add has increased as well, driving their pay higher.

Stiglitz will have none of this. He sees the boom in the incomes of the one percent as largely the result of what economists call “rent-seeking.” Most of us think of rent as the payment a landlord gets in exchange for the use of his property. But economists use the word in a broader sense: it’s any excess payment a company or an individual receives because something is keeping competitive forces from driving returns down. So the extra profit a monopolist earns because he faces no competition is a rent. The extra profits that big banks earn because they have the implicit backing of the government, which will bail them out if things go wrong, are a rent. And the extra profits that pharmaceutical companies make because their products are protected by patents are rents as well.

Not all rents are terrible for the economy—in some cases they’re necessary evils. We have patents, for instance, because we think that the costs of granting a temporary monopoly are outweighed by the benefits of the increased innovation that patent protection is supposed to encourage. But rents make the economy less efficient, because they move it away from the ideal of perfect competition, and they make consumers worse off. So from the perspective of the economy as a whole, rent-seeking is a waste of time and energy. As Stiglitz puts it, the economy suffers when “more efforts go into ‘rent seeking’—getting a larger slice of the country’s economic pie—than into enlarging the size of the pie.”

Rents are nothing new—if you go back to the 1950s, many big American corporations faced little competition and enjoyed what amounted to oligopolies. But there’s a good case to be made that the sheer amount of rent-seeking in the US economy has expanded over the years. The number of patents is vastly greater than it once was. Copyright terms have gotten longer. Occupational licensing rules (which protect professionals from competition) are far more common. Tepid antitrust enforcement has led to reduced competition in many industries. Most importantly, the financial industry is now a much bigger part of the US economy than it was in the 1970s, and for Stiglitz, finance profits are, in large part, the result of what he calls “predatory rent-seeking activities,” including the exploitation of uninformed borrowers and investors, the gaming of regulatory schemes, and the taking of risks for which financial institutions don’t bear the full cost (because the government will bail them out if things go wrong).

All this rent-seeking, Stiglitz argues, leaves certain industries, like finance and pharmaceuticals, and certain companies within those industries, with an outsized share of the rewards. And within those companies, the rewards tend to be concentrated as well, thanks to what Stiglitz calls “abuses of corporate governance that lead CEOs to take a disproportionate share of corporate profits” (another form of rent-seeking). In Stiglitz’s view of the economy, then, the people at the top are making so much because they’re in effect collecting a huge stack of rents.

This isn’t just bad in some abstract sense, Stiglitz suggests. It also hurts

society and the economy. It erodes America’s “sense of identity, in which fair play, equality of opportunity, and a sense of community are so important.” It alienates people from the system. And it makes the rich, who are obviously politically influential, less likely to support government investment in public goods (like education and infrastructure) because those goods have little impact on their lives. (The one percent are, in fact, more likely than the general public to support cutting spending on things like schools and highways.)

More interestingly (and more contentiously), Stiglitz argues that inequality does serious damage to economic growth: the more unequal a country becomes, the slower it’s likely to grow. He argues that inequality hurts demand, because rich people consume less of their incomes. It leads to excessive debt, because people feel the need to borrow to make up for their stagnant incomes and keep up with the Joneses. And it promotes financial instability, as central banks try to make up for stagnant incomes by inflating bubbles, which eventually burst. (Consider, for instance, the toleration, and even promotion, of the housing bubble by Alan Greenspan when he was chairman of the Fed.) So an unequal economy is less robust, productive, and stable than it otherwise would be. More equality, then, can actually lead to more efficiency, not less. As Stiglitz writes, “Looking out for the other guy isn’t just good for the soul—it’s good for business.”

This explanation of both the rise in inequality and its consequences is quite neat, if also bleak. But it’s also, it has to be said, oversimplified. Take the question, for instance, of whether inequality really is bad for economic growth. It certainly seems plausible that it would be, and there are a number of studies that suggest it is. Yet exactly why inequality is bad for growth turns out to be hard to pin down—different studies often point to different culprits. And when you look at cross-country comparisons, it turns out to be difficult to prove that there’s a direct connection between inequality and the particular negative factors that Stiglitz cites. Among developed countries, more unequal ones don’t, as a rule, have lower levels of consumption or higher levels of debt, and financial crises seem to afflict both unequal countries, like the US, and more egalitarian ones, like Sweden.

This doesn’t mean that, as conservative economists once insisted, inequality is good for economic growth. In fact, it’s clear that US-style inequality does not help economies grow faster, and that moving toward more equality will not do any damage. We just can’t yet say for certain that it will give the economy a big boost.

Similarly, Stiglitz’s relentless focus on rent-seeking as an explanation of just why the rich have gotten so much richer makes a messy, complicated problem simpler than it is. To some degree, he acknowledges this: in *The Price of Inequality*, he writes, “Of course, not all the inequality in our society is the result of rent seeking.... Markets matter, as do social forces....” Yet he doesn’t really say much about either of those in *The Great Divide*. It’s unquestionably true that rent-seeking is an important

part of the rise of the one percent. But it’s really only part of the story.

When we talk about the one percent, we’re talking about two groups of people above all: corporate executives and what are called “financial professionals” (these include people who work for banks and the like, but also money managers, financial advisers, and so on). These are the people that Piketty terms “supermanagers,” and he estimates that together they account for over half of the people in the one percent.

The emblematic figures here are corporate CEOs, whose pay rose 876 percent between 1978 and 2012, and hedge fund managers, some of whom now routinely earn billions of dollars a year. As one famous statistic has it, last year the top twenty-five hedge fund manag-



ers together earned more than all the kindergarten teachers in America did.

Stiglitz wants to attribute this extraordinary rise in CEO pay, and the absurd amounts of money that asset managers make, to the lack of good regulation. CEOs, in his account, are exploiting deficiencies in corporate governance—supine boards and powerless shareholders—to exploit shareholders and “appropriate for themselves firm revenues.” Money managers, meanwhile, are exploiting the ignorance of investors, reaping the benefits of what Stiglitz calls “uncompetitive and often undisclosed fees” to ensure that they get paid well even when they underperform.

The idea that high CEO pay is ultimately due to poor corporate governance is a commonplace, and certainly there are many companies where the relationship between the CEO and the board of directors (which in theory is supposed to be supervising him) is too cozy. Yet as an explanation for why CEOs get paid so much more today than they once did, Stiglitz’s argument is unsatisfying. After all, back in the 1960s and 1970s, when CEOs were paid much less, corporate governance was, by any measure, considerably worse than it is today, not better. As one recent study put it:

Corporate boards were predominately made up of insiders...or friends of the CEO from the “old boys’ network.” These directors had a largely advisory role, and would rarely overturn or even mount major challenges to CEO decisions.

Shareholders, meanwhile, had fewer rights and were less active. Since then, we’ve seen a host of reforms that have given shareholders more power and made boards more diverse and independent. If CEO compensation were primarily the result of bad corporate governance, these changes should have had at least some effect. They haven’t. In fact, CEO pay has continued to rise at a brisk rate.

It’s possible, of course, that further reform of corporate governance (like giving shareholders the ability to cast a binding vote on CEO pay packages) will change this dynamic, but it seems unlikely. After all, companies with private owners—who have total control over how much to pay their executives—pay their CEOs absurd salaries, too. And CEOs who come into a company from outside—meaning that they have no sway at all over the board—actually get paid more than inside candidates, not less. Since 2010, shareholders have been able to show their approval or disapproval of CEO pay packages by casting nonbinding “say on pay” votes. Almost all of those packages have been approved by large margins. (This year, for instance, these packages were supported, on average, by 95 percent of the votes cast.)

Similarly, while money managers do reap the benefits of opaque and overpriced fees for their advice and management of portfolios, particularly when dealing with ordinary investors (who sometimes don’t understand what they’re paying for), it’s hard to make the case that this is why they’re so much richer than they used to be. In the first place, opaque as they are, fees are actually easier to understand than they once were, and money managers face considerably more competition than before, particularly from low-cost index funds. And when it comes to hedge fund managers, their fee structure hasn’t changed much over the years, and their clients are typically reasonably sophisticated investors. It seems improbable that hedge fund managers have somehow gotten better at fooling their clients with “uncompetitive and often undisclosed fees.”

So what’s really going on? Something much simpler: asset managers are just managing much more money than they used to, because there’s much more capital in the markets than there once was. As recently as 1990, hedge funds managed a total of \$38.9 billion. Today, it’s closer to \$3 trillion. Mutual funds in the US had \$1.6 trillion in assets in 1992. Today, it’s more than \$16 trillion. And that means that an asset manager today can get paid far better than an asset manager was twenty years ago, even without doing a better job.

This doesn’t mean that asset managers or corporate executives “deserve” what they earn. In fact, there’s no convincing evidence that CEOs are any better, in relative terms, than they once were, and plenty of evidence that they are paid more than they need to be, in view of their performance. Similarly, asset managers haven’t gotten better at beating the market. The point, though, is that attributing the rise in their pay to corruption, or bad rules, doesn’t get us that far. More important,

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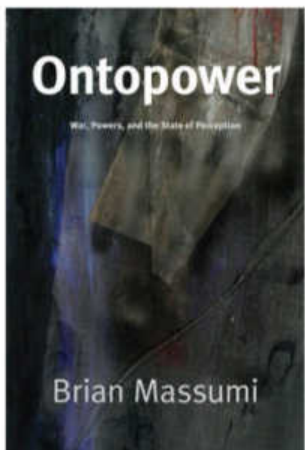
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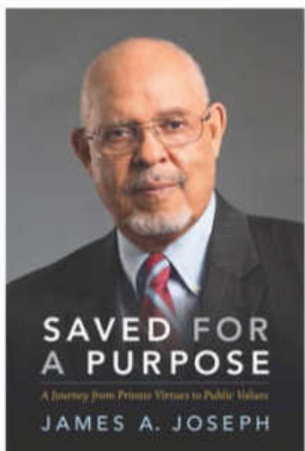
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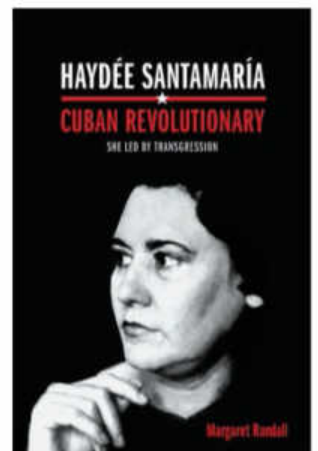
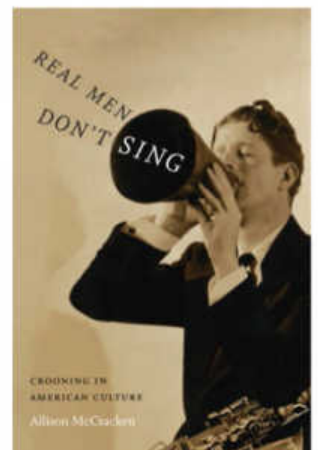
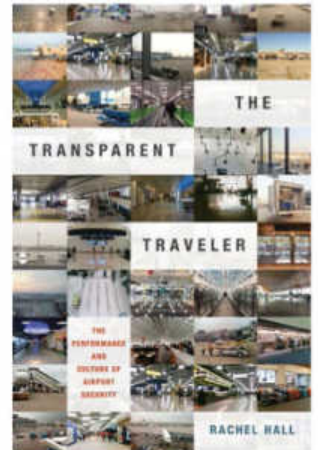
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probably, has been the rise of ideological assumptions about the indispensability of CEOs, and changes in social norms that made it seem like executives should take whatever they could get. (Stiglitz alludes to these in *The Price of Inequality*, writing, “Norms of what was ‘fair’ changed, too.”) Discussions of shifts in norms often become what the economist Robert Solow once called a “blaze of amateur sociology.” But that doesn’t mean we can afford to ignore those shifts, either, since the rise of the one percent has been propelled by ideological changes as much as by economic or regulatory ones.

Complicating Stiglitz’s account of the rise of the one percent is not just an intellectual exercise. It actually has important consequences for thinking about how we can best deal with inequality. Strategies for reducing inequality can be generally put into two categories: those that try to improve the pretax distribution of income (this is sometimes called, clunkily, predistribution) and those that use taxes and transfers to change the post-tax distribution of income (this is what we usually think of as redistribution). Increasing the minimum wage is an example of predistribution. Medicaid is redistribution.

Stiglitz’s agenda for policy—which is sketched in *The Great Divide*, and laid out in comprehensive detail in *Rewriting the Rules*—relies on both kinds of strategies, but he has high hopes that

better rules, designed to curb rent-seeking, will have a meaningful impact on the pretax distribution of income. Among other things, he wants much tighter regulation of the financial sector. He wants to loosen intellectual property restrictions (which will reduce the value of patents), and have the government aggressively enforce antitrust laws. He wants to reform corporate governance so CEOs have less influence over corporate boards and shareholders have more say over CEO pay. He wants to limit tax breaks that encourage the use of stock options. And he wants asset managers to “publicly disclose holdings, returns, and fee structures.” In addition to bringing down the income of the wealthiest Americans, he advocates measures like a higher minimum wage and laws encouraging stronger unions, to raise the income of ordinary Americans (though this is not the main focus of *The Great Divide*).

These are almost all excellent suggestions. And were they enacted, some—including above all tighter regulation of the financial industry—would have an impact on corporate rents and inequality. But it would be surprising if these rules did all that much to shrink the income of much of the one percent, precisely because improvements in corporate governance and asset managers’ transparency are likely to have a limited effect on CEO salaries and money managers’ compensation.

This is not a counsel of despair, though. In the first place, these rules

would be good things for the economy as a whole, making it more efficient and competitive. More important, the second half of Stiglitz’s agenda—redistribution via taxes and transfers—remains a tremendously powerful tool for dealing with inequality. After all, while pretax inequality is a problem in its own right, what’s most destructive is soaring posttax inequality. And it’s posttax inequality that most distinguishes the US from other developed countries. As Stiglitz writes:

Some other countries have as much, or almost as much, before-tax and transfer inequality; but those countries that have allowed market forces to play out in this way then trim back the inequality through taxes and transfer and the provision of public services.

The redistributive policies Stiglitz advocates look pretty much like what you’d expect. On the tax front, he wants to raise taxes on the highest earners and on capital gains, institute a carbon tax and a financial transactions tax, and cut corporate subsidies. But dealing with inequality isn’t just about taxation. It’s also about investing. As he puts it, “If we spent more on education, health, and infrastructure, we would strengthen our economy, now and in the future.” So he wants more investment in schools, infrastructure, and basic research.

If you’re a free-market fundamentalist, this sounds disastrous—a recipe

for taking money away from the job creators and giving it to government, which will just waste it on bridges to nowhere. But here is where Stiglitz’s academic work and his political perspective intersect most clearly. The core insight of Stiglitz’s research has been that, left on their own, markets are not perfect, and that smart policy can nudge them in better directions.

Indeed, *Creating a Learning Society* is dedicated to showing how developing countries can use government policy to become high-growth, knowledge-intensive economies, rather than remaining low-cost producers of commodities. What this means for the future of the US is only suggestive, but Stiglitz argues that it means the government should play a major role in the ongoing “structural transformation” of the economy.

Of course, the political challenge in doing any of this (let alone all of it) is immense, in part because inequality makes it harder to fix inequality. And even for progressives, the very familiarity of the tax-and-transfer agenda may make it seem less appealing. After all, the policies that Stiglitz is calling for are, in their essence, not much different from the policies that shaped the US in the postwar era: high marginal tax rates on the rich and meaningful investment in public infrastructure, education, and technology. Yet there’s a reason people have never stopped pushing for those policies: they worked. And as Stiglitz writes, “Just because you’ve heard it before doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try it again.” □

‘The Knife There on the Shelf’

Dan Chiasson

On Elizabeth Bishop

by Colm Tóibín.

Princeton University Press, 209 pp., \$19.95

On Elizabeth Bishop is the Irish writer Colm Tóibín’s exquisite study of the American poet, a book whose modest proportions suggest the personal nature of the connection. Tóibín has written a book he could have carried along with him in the nomadic period this study recalls, when, far from home, Bishop’s poems of travel and memory, also deceptively slight, first made their impression on him.

Bishop is a “writer’s writer’s writer,” according to John Ashbery; she tends to mean everything to writers to whom she means anything. Her work provided for Tóibín what Kenneth Burke said literature can provide: “equipment for living” under conditions (the early loss of parents, the awakening to one’s homosexuality, the discovery of a vocation for writing) that recalled Bishop’s own. The tact and poise and proportion Tóibín learned from Bishop are the very qualities that make this study of the poet so satisfying.

The book is partly a defense of understatement. Bishop’s Nova Scotia, where she spent the happiest years of her childhood, and Tóibín’s southeastern Ireland, both, according to Tóibín, value language partly as “a way to restrain experience, to take it down to a level where it might stay.” The implication is that “experience” is too wayward and threatening to be left alone, and



Elizabeth Bishop, Brazil, 1954

that language is less a working out than a tamping down. This is the tension we find in much of Bishop’s work, where a style pared of ornament and excess implies—and, with growing openness across the arc of her career, explores—the painful life material it paradoxically “restrains.” Frost’s idea of poetry as a “momentary stay against confusion” comes to mind; Frost, whose influence on Bishop has rarely been noted, is yet another writer whose region and family predisposed him to defend in his poems the virtues of reticence and skepticism manifested by his poems.

It is also a study of shyness, which, whatever its root, is a trait so many writers possess. For a writer, speaking is terrifying, since it operates under conditions foreign to composition: one might be interrupted or distracted, or find one’s meanings questioned before they are fully developed and expressed. Tone, which is entirely in the writer’s hands, seeps into speech from circumstances no writer can control: his accent, his reflexive vocabulary, the pitch of his voice, even his appearance and posture—these are all elements of spoken self-presentation that cannot

really be controlled in the moment, in social interaction. Advantage: writing. But writing may lack the lifeblood, the qualities of surprise and innovation, we find in speech. How can a writer recreate speech on the page, not excluding the thrill of risk and innovation we find in the most brilliant conversation?

Bishop’s poetry, with its ingeniously crafted personae and deflections of a thousand kinds, makes a preemptive strike against embarrassment. Tóibín, who developed a stammer around the time he was eight, after his father’s brain surgery had made it so that his son “could not understand him when he spoke,” turns to writing as a way of ruling out all the anticipated shame of speaking. “I have a close relationship with silence, with things withheld, things known and not said,” he writes.

I am sure that no one said anything to me, for example, before I went into that room where I saw my father after the operation. And no one mentioned afterward that we would not easily be able to understand his speech, and that my speech was also a problem. What was there to say? And we lived like that for three and a half years; we got used to it. And then in July 1967 my father died. There was a funeral and the house was full of people, but there was silence again soon afterward.

The silence is collaborative and cumulative; if you grow up in these

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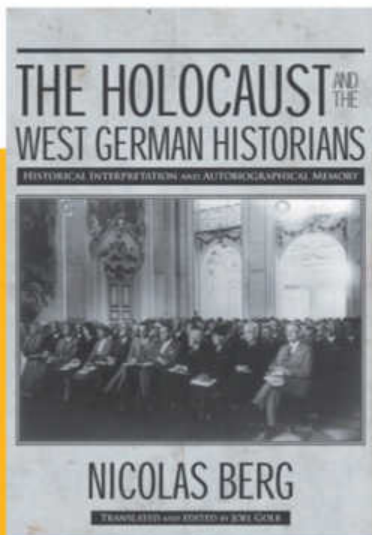
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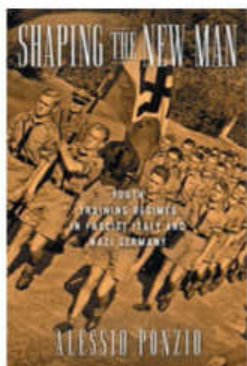


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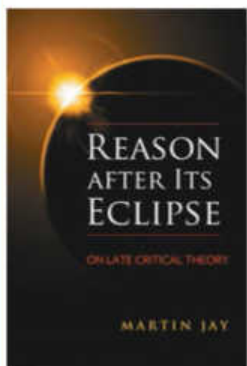
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circumstances, you attach naturally to objects, since they too seem to be standing in the midst of pain with a kind of ceremony and integrity. A passage from Bishop's late masterpiece "Crusoe in England" comes to mind:

*The knife there on the shelf—
it reeked of meaning, like a
crucifix.*

*It lived. How many years did I
beg it, implore it, not to break?
I knew each nick and scratch by
heart,
the bluish blade, the broken tip,
the lines of wood-grain on the
handle...*

*Now it won't look at me at all.
The living soul has dribbled away.
My eyes rest on it and pass on.*

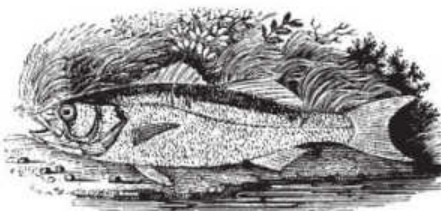
There are many such objects in Bishop—an ashtray, a stack of envelopes, the "Large Bad Picture" described in the poem by that name—whose "living soul" can be restored only by the attention she pays to them in language, in retrospect. The question of silence in Bishop's work immediately points us to these extraordinary objects that seem somehow to have been stunned into mute passivity.

Reading Bishop with Tóibín as our guide, we encounter a poet whose early losses underlie her surfeit of description, as though the world, painstakingly mapped, could compensate for the deracinations of the child. Her biography is well known: she was born in 1911; her father died when she was eight months old, while her mother, suffering under the strains of grief, went mad and was institutionalized in 1916. Though she lived until 1934, Bishop never saw her again. Bishop, knowing that her mother was alive, was then passed from relative to relative before being sent to boarding school, at Walnut Hill School, in Natick, Massachusetts, and then to Vassar. Her childhood and early adulthood, including her formative years as a poet, were all conducted in light of Bishop's knowledge that her mother was very much alive. What a strange predicament, to have closed the books on a childhood that was by no means safely in the past. Loss is always mingled with guilt; in this case, the two were causally connected.

Such a difficult early life might have kindled in some writers a desire to put down roots and stay put. But a change in outward circumstances can tend to solidify the continuities within, and Bishop's poetry, from the beginning, expressed the peculiar phenomenon of feeling always like oneself, never more, never less, whatever the accidents of time and place. The farther one goes in time and distance from one's childhood, the more surprising it is to find the self essentially unchanged; that irony, deepening with time, is Bishop's real subject, and it meant that she would almost necessarily have a great late period. Indeed her last book, *Geography III*, is her best and her most poignant.

Bishop is still sometimes misunderstood as a poet of elegant description, visually exact if psychologically remote. Lost were the moral dimensions of description, which become clear every time a poet chooses to describe one thing instead of another—this sandpiper,

this doily, this armadillo—for a specific duration and in a deliberate sequence. Her canniest illustration of these choices and their associated risks is "The Fish," which for years was Bishop's best-known poem. (It has been supplanted by "One Art," her brilliant villanelle: a better but less interesting work.) The poem was in some anthology I encountered as a teenager, predictably offered as a lesson in precision and detail. The poem traces the arc of a single action, catching and releasing a fish: its first line is "I caught a tremendous fish"; its last line, concluding a complex twelve-line sentence, is "And I let the fish go." In between, we get description: exquisite, "apt," almost an MFA workshop lesson *avant la lettre* in the crafting of vivid detail:



*He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
—the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly—
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.*

The poem is so explicit about its cruelty as to be almost a kind of prank, and yet critics have usually missed the point: description takes time, time the fish, "breathing in/the terrible oxygen," can't spare. "The Fish" is Bishop's take on poetry's claim to timelessness, which leaves out the fact that timeless things are encountered in time. Substitute for the expiring fish Bishop's own mortality, and ours, and we see how cunning a poet of temporal emergency Bishop in fact is. Just because we die more slowly than an asphyxiating fish doesn't make the passing moments any less serious, as the remaining years become hours become days and moments.

One of the ways Bishop indicates the tragic content she will not disclose is to commit her speakers to blinkered, near-comic excesses of description. She differs from her great mentor Marianne Moore in that, for Bishop, "relentless accuracy" is not so much a goal as a dodge, since it so often operates on the surface of very deep waters. It is better to have emotions than to have descriptions.

"The Armadillo" charts the arc of celebratory "fire balloons" on a warm night in Brazil. They begin, as Tóibín puts it, "merely pretty," before quickly turning "lethal":

*This is the time of year
when almost every night
the frail, illegal fire balloons
appear.
Climbing the mountain height,*

*rising toward a saint
still honored in these parts,
the paper chambers flush and
fill with light
that comes and goes, like hearts.*

So far so good; and yet that word "frail," since it is usually reserved for the ill or the elderly, suggests a level of threat hidden to the speaker, who insists on cosmetic touches like the rhyme of "parts" with "hearts." In fact these "fire balloons"—the very name suggests ruined innocence—will soon plummet from the sky and ignite the landscape, a catastrophe that the speaker seems morally incapable of noticing:

*Last night another big one fell.
It splattered like an egg of fire
against the cliff behind the house.
The flame ran down. We saw the
pair*

*of owls who nest there flying up
and up, their whirling
black-and-white
stained bright pink underneath,
until
they shrieked up out of sight.*

*The ancient owls' nest must have
burned.
Hastily, all alone,
a glistening armadillo left
the scene,
rose-flecked, head down,
tail down,*

*and then a baby rabbit jumped
out,
short-eared, to our surprise.
So soft!—a handful of
intangible ash
with fixed, ignited eyes.*

The word "another" requires us to go back to the start of the poem and register its leisurely, aestheticizing description as a form of willed blindness; what has just happened had happened already. But this speaker is chronically deficient in the kinds of sympathy that Bishop possesses in spades; often her poems are spoken by figures whose illusion of command, sustained despite worsening crises, distinguish them from Bishop, who knows not to strike the naturalist's note ("short-eared, to our surprise") when a rabbit is on fire.

Bishop's poems often send us back to their beginnings, the second time through highly colored by revelations at their close. "The Fish" is a different poem once we've read it, as is "The Armadillo," as is "The Moose," her magnificent narrative poem about a bus trip from Nova Scotia to Boston. This is also the pattern in her career, the late poems revisiting images and details from the early ones, the sense of an origin changed by having already arrived at our destination.

Tóibín's little book on Bishop is a writer's exercise in rechristening himself, a second time through with Bishop as his chaperone. The narrative draws us back to moments when the discovery of Bishop, and later of Thom Gunn, drew Tóibín forward. This is the kind of beautiful relay that great writers provide for each other, and it gives you hope that some young person somewhere who finds himself in a bind will pick this short book up and find in it not one, but two companions. □



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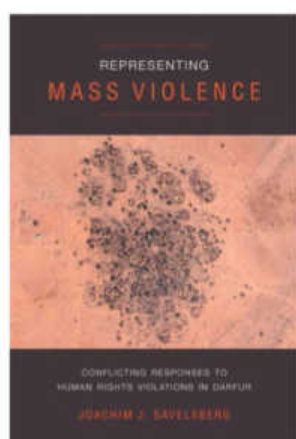
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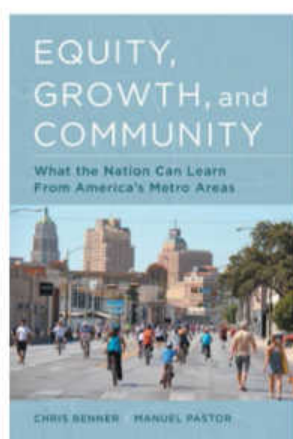
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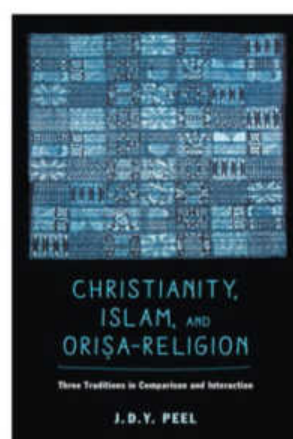
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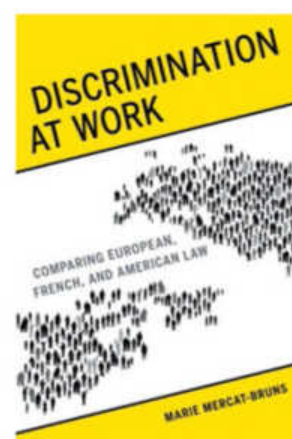
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True Detective

a television series
created and written
by Nic Pizzolatto.
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The low-key romance that grows between two people working side by side has sometimes been the subject of great literature. It constitutes the most optimistic part of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and the least gruesome part of Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*, which ends with an authorial lecture on camaraderie and how men and women are often denied it when confined to gender-specific work. Both novels make their arguments for fond, sensible bonding born of cooperative labor.

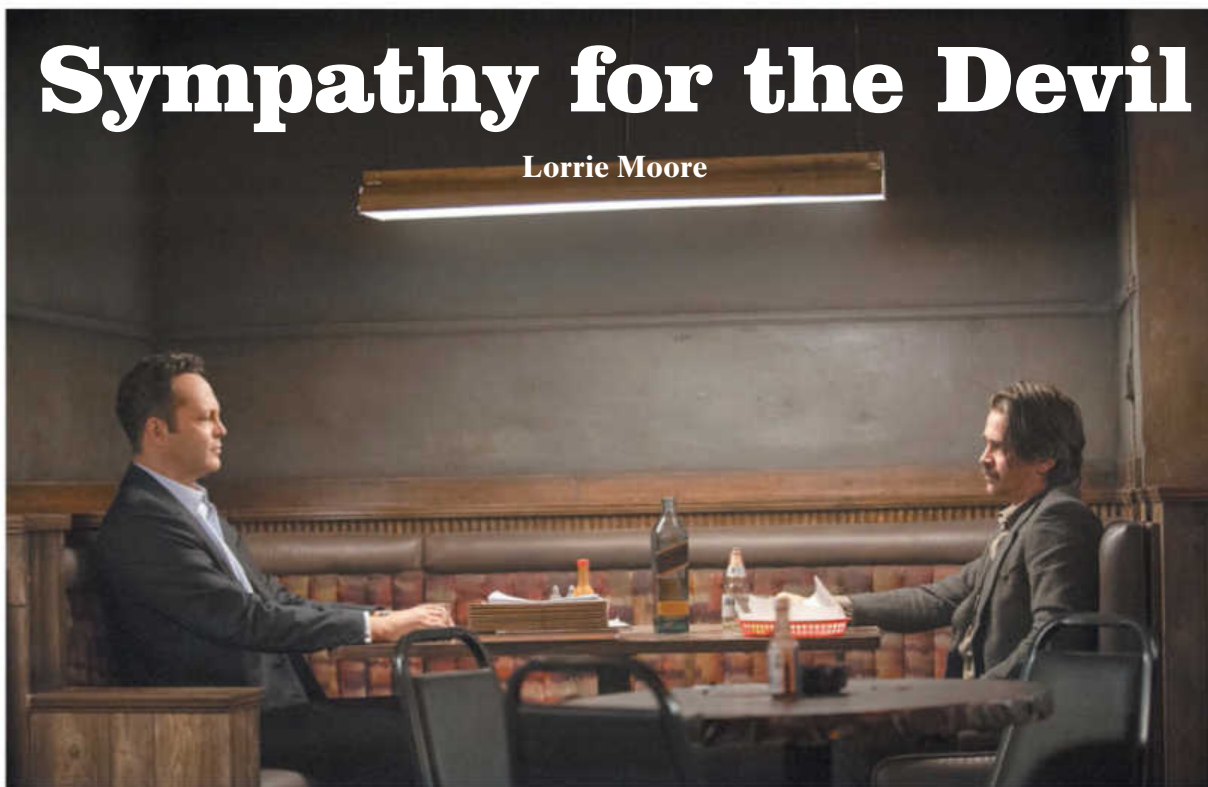
Television understood this (somewhat) early on and at least by the 1960s producers began to fabricate work situations where male and female characters (well, maybe only one female character) could week after week banter and attach without having actually to date: the comedy writers' room in *The Dick Van Dyke Show*; the investigative reporters and their researchers in *The Name of the Game*; various West Coast detectives and their secretaries or assistants (*Mannix*, *Ironside*); *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*'s Minneapolis television newsroom. No passion was truly in play in these job settings but sibling-like intimacy and affection between the sexes was the glue that held the ensemble together week after week.

Still, as glue goes, American screen narrative has mostly preferred the bromance, the cowboy aspect of two male detectives getting to know each other on a hot or cold case (women detectives in the UK—Helen Mirren in *Prime Suspect*, Gillian Anderson in *The Fall*—have tended to go it alone) and if the brotherly duo also expresses our nation's federalist principles, as well as its difficult class divisions, by having one educated person at the state or national level team up with a local law enforcement officer who has never left town, well then, people, we have a show. The only gender reversal I've seen of this—*The Heat*, starring Melissa McCarthy as the local cop and Sandra Bullock as the FBI agent—was set in Boston and played for laughs and was one of the funniest movies I've ever seen.

When *True Detective* aired last year on HBO it was squarely in the familiar trope of two guys getting to know each other on the job, doing some squabbling, some drinking, and having each other's back. At the end there is a long predictable rescue of one by the other. And yet it seemed entirely original. This is due to several elements that are all in perfect sync with one another: the Louisiana setting (its shabby gulf towns, its tent meetings of bayou Baptists, its silvery swamps), the exquisite cinematography of Adam Arkapaw, and the acting, all threaded on the same needle by the director Carey Joji Fukunaga. These worked together to give the show the look of a great film, where characters seem a natural part of the locale: through sensitive pho-

Sympathy for the Devil

Lorrie Moore



Vince Vaughn and Colin Farrell in the second season of *True Detective*

tography the setting seems to liquefy and flow into the cast to form (not just inform) the characters' blood and spit, vowels and squints, headshakes and struts. Their hot tears are a warm rain from the wide celluloid sky. This is assisted by first-rate actors, who possess the highest powers of concentration. The ability on a camera-laden set to inhabit a character without a twitch of distraction or preoccupation or visible hint of the internally or externally irrelevant is a scary but brilliant feat.

Ordinary people cannot do it. But I have seen great actors do it even at cocktail receptions full of cell phones. In a world where major writers have announced that they cannot focus on their work without extracting or blocking the modems in their laptops, this kind of thespian concentration is worth noting. (One thinks of the writer Anne Lamott's remark on her own maturing undistractibility: "I used to not be able to work if there were dishes in the sink," she has said. "Then I had a child and now I can work if there is a corpse in the sink.")

Woody Harrelson as Louisiana cop Marty Hart with his angry underbite, interesting blood pressure spikes, and recognizable male jazz moves gives a performance that grows more impressive on subsequent viewings, while Matthew McConaughey as the former DEA agent Rust Cohle with his extravagant enigmas and bored-to-the-gills gnomic utterances is instantly mesmerizing. He believes the world is "a giant gutter in outer space." When Hart, his CID partner of three months, asks him if he's a Christian, he says, "In philosophical terms I'm what's called a pessimist."

"What's that mean?" asks Hart.

"It means I'm bad at parties."

"Let me tell you," replies Hart. "You ain't great outside of parties either."

Rust Cohle feels the entire human species should do itself a favor and just walk off into the eternal sunset. He himself is intermittently on the wagon and doesn't have the temperament for suicide. He and Hart are a hoot and were made for the long police vehicle rides that Hart would like to turn into a silent zone and yet never does.

"Why don't you just watch that car commercial if you like McConaughey's acting so much?" a *True Detective* skeptic recently said to me. (I love that car commercial, though I've now forgotten what car it is for.) Harrelson's and McConaughey's performances are indelible and distinctive if easily parodied; one can go to YouTube and find some amusing imitations. (I recommend a video titled "True Barista.") But as with many parodies they honor with their mockery—no writer was ever parodied more than Hemingway—and parodies do not necessarily disparage their source but rather sing a cozy, observant ditty alongside it, as the Greek etymology of the word *parody* recommends. In any case, embracing laughter and the object of that laughter is only irony and Keatsian intelligence, not assassination. Watching Harrelson and McConaughey together is pure joy.

There is a bit of Hemingway in *True Detective*: the terse vale-of-tears dialogue, the visitor from far away filling up with the air of a new land. Hart and Cohle (not pronounced "soul" but we feel the blackened spirit) garden and enact their forensic partnership, sharing one woman, many cigarettes, and a mild fascination with each other, while remaining their own best advocates, a psychological project that seldom lets up. Hart clings to his hard-won normalcy—wife, kids, house, job—even if it bores him.

Cohle has left all that. He lost his only child and is now completely on his own in the world, having been raised by a Vietnam vet survivalist in Idaho to whom he no longer speaks. Cohle's shoot-out with some biker drug runners is filmed and scored to resemble something from that war—so says the show's writer and creator Nic Pizzolatto—so we are made to understand that the 1960s have forever hovered over the children who grew up in that decade. This idea continues in season two, when Rachel McAdams as the daughter of a haughty spiritual leader speaks derisively of having grown up on a "hippie" commune.

Cohle, the former DEA undercover agent, has been put on a murder case with Lake Charles cop Hart because the crime seems to be of a serial nature. A visitor from another world, which

may only be Texas, where his previous work records have been redacted, Cohle takes notes in a large ledger and speaks as if he were the CEO of a nihilist fortune cookie company. He is reprimanded on his existentialism by the partially spellbound Marty. "I wouldn't go around spouting that shit I was you. People around here don't think that way." Despite the region's tent-top religiosity, Cohle's oracular soliloquies will be deemed unhinged. In a gentler moment Marty says to Cohle, "For a guy who sees no point in existence you sure fret about it an awful lot." Harrelson brings a nice comedic drawl to his line readings. His Marty Hart is trying to be a good family man but remains an ordinary hothead and philanderer who has married up in society and is

of several minds about it.

As a result, he takes up a little torridly with a court stenographer, which gets him kicked out of the house, putting him in closer domestic proximity to his work partner, setting parts of the story in faster motion. The show's languidness, however, is part of its charm, part of its cable medium, and the imitative fallacy notwithstanding, part of its portrait of the South.

Even to say that *True Detective* has a plot—that is, a story that proceeds as a set of human actions and their consequences—is to miss what there is to admire about the series's ambling and rich narrative (not the story, which is alternately incoherent and trite). The narrative is really more an assemblage of characters and scenes. To summarize the plot would make it seem boring and absurd. In short, the detectives are trying to track down who or what is responsible for some ritualistic murders of women—either a cult or a lone sicko or both. They have to interrogate the local tough guys both in and out of jail and there is a lot of vague talk about the "Yellow King," a term used to give a screenwriter's loose idea a little mythic buttressing.

Although the writing may be the weakest link in the show (it is helped in season one by T. Bone Burnett's music, which is steadily mindful of ambience, mood, roots), the first-season script has things to recommend it, primarily a useful time-straddling structure in which convincingly older incarnations of Hart and Cohle are under investigation by Internal Affairs and are allowed, in answer to the interrogators' questions, to offer additional if laconic interpretations of each other throughout the eight episodes.

Pizzolatto also provides sharp, amusing dialogue custom-fitted to the actors, plus a deep knowledge of Louisiana, where he grew up. A scene shot in a Lake Charles strip club located directly across the street from a girl's dancing school is something a fiction writer cannot make up persuasively, despite the facts, despite the serendipitous signage, so Pizzolatto doesn't include it (but mentions it in the commentary). He knows when reality is interesting,

when reality is irrelevant, and when reality is no excuse. This sense of what to leave out comes from sifting through one's deep knowledge of a locale. Intelligently exploiting a terrain largely unfamiliar to the viewer works well here and has been effective in other off-kilter police procedurals, from Joel and Ethan Coen's *Fargo* (which used the snow of the directors' boyhood Minnesota to great advantage) to *Top of the Lake*, in which Jane Campion's native New Zealand is filmed with intimacy and awe (by *True Detective*'s own season one cinematographer, Arkapaw).

Thus it is disappointing to see *True Detective*'s season two return to the belly of the beast of conventional cop dramas: Southern California. And a lot of what was sometimes disparaged about the first season of *True Detective*—its southern Gothic noir, its amusing faux philosophy, its virility—will be missed in the much limper second season. A motif of impotence pervades all the bedrooms in season two; the setting is an LA suburb named Vinci—Latin for overcome, spent. Teeth and teethlike objects spill out like the most Freudian of dreams. “What the fuck is Vinci?” one character asks. “A city. Supposedly,” is the reply.

“We get the world we deserve,” says the new season's poster. Alas: we don't even get the second seasons we deserve. Season two has a different crew, different cast, different directors, and most unfortunately a different cinematographer. It doesn't resemble the first season much at all. T. Bone Burnett still does the score but the music is heavy, unintegrated, full of dread: Leonard Cohen sounding gruff and demonic in the title sequence; a chanteuse in a nightclub called the Black Rose wailing “this is my least favorite life” only fifty minutes in; a baleful jazz trumpet accompanying pensive aerial shots of nighttime highways. All do little but subtract by attempting to underscore. Burnett goes for something gloomier and synthetic here—the music working largely as interior monologue for the new characters who now have an even lesser script to live in.

The primary creative holdover from the first season is Pizzolatto, and so one may recognize the same random pacing, the nonconverging storylines, the villains in scary masks, strangers wearing angel wings, the gingerly skirting of the subject of race, the nonstop interest in sex workers, a weary sympathy for the devil, the damaged perpetrating their own damage, and the abundance of flat female characters who are “rounded out” by scenes that have them scold their men and show “agency”—as is said in craft discussions. These new detectives of season two—Antigone or “Ani” Bezzerides (Rachel McAdams) rocking her family anger, Ray Velcoro (Colin Farrell) rolling his desperate family love, and Paul Woodrugh (Taylor Kitsch) racing away from the Mideastern desert, Tikrit, and a guy he once slept with—are all psychically burned to a crisp. The dialogue is hard-boiled and tight—when not desperately working at exposition.

“Can I ask how much you drink in an average week?” a concerned doctor noting Ray's red-lining liver asks him.

“All I can,” Ray replies.

Like the old TV show *The Mod Squad*, whom these cops seem to be

referencing in their beauty, their backstories, their leather jackets, their inscrutability and recruit potential for undercover work, this is an impressive trio of California young people, though it is sometimes hard to notice when they are so dissolute, disgusted, or just weary and hidden from the sun in windowless interiors whose ochre lighting and general color scheme is something like Edward Hopper meets Dennis Hopper. (At least one scene is a direct visual quote from *Nighthawks*.) In the shadowy claustrophobic rooms the crew's lights sometimes hit an actor's face in the copperish air (a visual pun?) and eyes glint and glisten, catlike, often without motivation. When our true detectives first meet one another and form their accidental trio at the end of episode one, they have been summoned

in the middle of the night: two of them are drunk, and the other has just tried to commit suicide; all of them are staring at a rest stop picnic bench on which sits the upright corpse of a missing city manager who has had his genitalia cut away and his eyes burned out.

This is our welcome to *True Detective*, season two. The funny sparks of life that lit things up between Hart and Cohle will be hard if not impossible to find here—bits of *Chinatown*, *The Big Sleep*, *Twin Peaks*, and other detective films will lumber in instead. Any humor will be in the hands of Vince Vaughn as a struggling casino owner named Frank and will probably be inadvertent. Vaughn, who like George Clooney radiates tidy, unsexy

handsomeness—Vaughn's delicately featured profile is similar to Julianne Moore's—has difficulty melting into the fabric of this program, trouble blending with its look and tone and so stands out as very much himself, as in, *what the heck is Vince Vaughn doing in this show?* He has his mouth full spouting nonsense like “Sometimes your worst self is your best self.” Or, “It's like blue balls but in the heart.” Or, “Never do anything out of hunger. Not even eating.” As well as other lines that, as *The Atlantic* has pointed out, sometimes sound as if they'd been Google-translated from Farsi.

Vaughn's rushed delivery resembles that of the character he played in the romantic comedy *Wedding Crashers*. This same-in-every-film movie-star trait he also shares with George Clooney,

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though not with the utterly transformed Rachel McAdams (who was also in *Wedding Crashers*). In fact, party-crashing may be the real metaphor of this season of *True Detective*; the McAdams character, Ani, does in fact crash a party ostensibly for investigative purposes; she is there to rescue and be rescued, the meat of all cop dramas, as well as to recover an ugly childhood memory from dad's dubious commune.

Early on may be too soon to say that Vaughn is miscast (though one wonders how the show might have been improved if Vaughn and Farrell each had the other's role). Vaughn's hypnotically askew performance grows on the viewer. Perhaps his performance will become legendary with time. (The city of Vinci is already practically named for him!) He plays Frank with inexpressive manipulateness, a dapper low-level gangster who is also an outsider. His face has the stillness of a hit man's but every once in a while fear darts across his empty eyes. Though the tallest in any room, Frank is in over his head, again a crasher, and at season's end Vaughn begins to own the cartoonishness of his two-bit psychopath and bully, and his Proustian death trudge in the final episode could have been funny but strangely is what it's supposed to be: a ghost story. We see him as perhaps the rivetingly rotted peg that has held the house together from the start. After all, this is the land of show business, of visions in the desert.

Still, one hears Vaughn's own tedium in lines like "Osip, we talked this through in Paris, Caspere's absence don't mean a thing," but when the Russian thugs with whom Frank is trying to do land deals speak better English than he does, it ends up eliciting some viewer pity, plus a smile, if a quick one. Frank lives literally in a glass house, and so we wait for the stones to come boomeranging. The incomprehensibility of the storyline—mine pollution! toxic dumping! the demise of the family farm! high-speed rail proposals! high-end hookers! spiritualists who size up auras like net worth! mysterious suicides!—can only be alleviated by a dash of predictability. But instead of remaining in all that glass (he later carves up a treacherous henchman's face with some), Frank unexpectedly downsizes to a Glendale bungalow with wallpaper. And eventually to plane tickets to Venezuela. When the body count around him gets a little high—killing calms and tames him, as is said of hawks—he becomes a thrilling arsonist.

Meanwhile the mod squad—Ani, Ray, and Paul—is having its private adventures. With righteous indignation Ani/Antigone, sporting a nonstop fume and seethe, plus ombré hair that is cleverly used by season's end to indicate the passage of time, takes on her bogus guru of a dad, who in his—or the writer's—sloppy neoclassicism has named his other daughter Athena after the "goddess of love." Really! Also, like her older counterparts in *The Fall* and *Prime Suspect*, as well as the French police procedural *Spiral*, Ani will have to endure reprimand and suspension for sexual misconduct with a subordinate. Women! In her required group therapy, where she is the only female participant and the scene struggles

unsuccessfully toward a humorous moment or two, there is too much vacant glowering for things to lighten; there is no tension or shared secret that might produce the release of energy humor requires. Comedy has to have its finger on the pulse of irreverence, something season one understood, but season two is too full of its own earnest regard for Ani's contemptuousness, despite McAdams's often admirable performance. Audience anticipation cannot be comedically disrupted because the entire movement of the story is desultory, without suspense, and the characters are too often defeated by it, despite a handful of well-directed set pieces: the shoot-out at the end of episode four; Ray and Frank with their guns drawn under a breakfast table in episode six; the entirety of



Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey
in the first season of *True Detective*

episode seven, shot with close-ups and crane shots and some real emotion.

Ray—who as he says isn't good at being muscle and yet Frank hires him as such twice—on very little evidence (a bad tip) has avenged a long-ago rape of his long-ago wife. In a gaping hole in the storyline the possibility that Ray is not the biological father of his son is going to be used against him in a custody battle. A legal consultant might have informed the scriptwriter that regardless of biological parentage, California, like most states, makes the man who is married to the mother at the time of a child's birth the father of that child and also provides for "marriage by estoppel." Ray is his son's legal father regardless of the child's flaming red hair. DNA tests are irrelevant in this custody contest.

That this forensic error continues into judicial hearings and right on through the finale, as if it were suspense, is unfortunate. Getting ready for his day in court (or his interview with Internal Affairs, who knows for sure?), Ray starts chewing gum and drinking water and in general cleans up nicely. He casts an alert sidelong glance at Ani—a bit of foreshadowing. Watching the gifted Colin Farrell work hard—with complicated feeling and no Dublin accent whatever—in scenes that often add up to nothing is, unfortunately, a little like watching his career itself.

"I'm enjoying this soberish you," Frank tells him, "where your head doesn't dip and fall when I talk."

All this while Paul is resisting the claims that his sexual past and his days in black ops keep making on him (one of the plot's many improbabilities is that it suggests a gay affair would be grounds for blackmail even when one is no longer in the military). It is satisfy-

ing to see Taylor Kitsch shake off his defining role as *Friday Night Lights*'s Tim Riggins. Nonetheless, Kitsch may be the only one here who is better when speaking and moving than gazing off pensively, which the directors have him do too much of, even into mirrors, and often when he is simply fixing his expression he sometimes seems lost as an actor, as if he doesn't know the camera's still rolling. (*Esquire*, in a piece called "What Is Taylor Kitsch Doing With His Face?," had some fun with Kitsch's dazed gaze during a sex scene.)

Mid-season, at the end of an astonishing shoot-out filmed like a battle in Fallujah, an episode concludes with Ray and Ani stooped in anguish but leaves Paul unbent, surrounded by carnage and looking guiltily triumphant if also unclear about what has just happened. Paul is a "god warrior" and perhaps confusion goes with being such a deity. One wants to shout "Cut" before the camera does cut, though when the camera does, it freezes to an eloquently composed frame of dubious victory, pulled back to view a devastating scene, which makes one suddenly optimistic about the rest of this wild show's second season, as if it finally had got its legs beneath it.

But things grow random again. The timeline lurches. The music becomes even stranger, often playing against what is on the screen: incongruous 1940s orchestral strings accompany a drugged-out orgy, for example. Just as early on we see Ray's father watching Kirk Douglas and Spencer Tracey in *The Detective*, in the finale a poster of Sam Peckinpah's *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* is shown long enough to let you know Pizzolatto's narrative aspirations, though a PowerPoint presentation might have been more clarifying. The mod squad, despite being taken off the streets after their huge shoot-out, are all working from their new posts in evidence, insurance fraud, and gangster consultation to get back out in the field again and to locate some missing persons (a script doctor!) and to solve some not very interesting crimes (misuse of a good cast!).

Along with cadmium and uranium (and more than a nickel or two), talent has been carelessly disposed of, devaluing some good ground. "Mine runoff," party-crashing, the recessive gene of the red hair of Satan, plus waste management generally are the leitmotifs of *True Detective*'s second season. Though not everything amounts to a hopeless wreck: when we lose Kitsch's Paul in a scene that is pretty much a steal from Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* it has the same devastating effect as losing Leonardo DiCaprio. And when there is finally some eros in the room between the remaining two detectives it too is emotionally convincing: they kiss like they mean it. Consequences ensue and haunt. Colin Farrell enacts the gypsy husband that memoirist Emma Forrest (*Your Voice in My Head*) claimed him to be. He is the Heathcliff in the house, and despite the sentimental gestures toward the innocence of children and the strength of women, which the script nods at hurriedly as it rushes headlong to its close, his true detective proves Hardy right: love of work is love indeed. □

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Little, Brown,
384 pp., \$28.00

**Is the American
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1.

"The incoherence in American foreign policy has been growing for twenty-five years," asserts Ian Bremmer. That's a considerable overstatement, and from an expert in the field, but there is no question that, at home and abroad, American policies (from long before the current administration) evoke widespread angst, uncertainty, and criticism. Judging from a flurry of recent books, the most basic features of the US role abroad remain in question. How much should we try to do in rapidly changing circumstances? What are we actually *able* to do? How much should we spend abroad? Can't a single principle be found to impose greater consistency on foreign policy?

Not only analysts and scholars are worried. I recently listened to a roomful of European leaders bemoan the lack of US commitment to NATO. Since the US accounts for twice as much of NATO members' military spending (more than 70 percent) as all of its European members combined, this was a bit hard to fathom. Moreover, that commitment, and the lack of it in Europe, extends to the public. A recent poll of citizens of eight NATO countries by the Pew Research Center found that only in the US and Canada is a majority prepared to go to war if a NATO ally is attacked—that being the central requirement of the NATO treaty and the *sine qua non* of collective defense. So just why are Europeans worried about America?

In the Sunni Middle East fear of a US withdrawal is pervasive. Yet the US maintains dozens of bases and

warships in and around the Persian Gulf—including major facilities and a substantial number of troops in Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. Operations are also based in Jordan and Turkey. CENTCOM, the US Central Command, in charge of this region, has been the United States' largest geographic command for many years. Yet a visitor to the region constantly hears that the day America will suddenly lose interest and depart is just around the corner. And in East Asia, governments from US allies to Beijing wonder whether America intends to remain the dominant Pacific power, whether the famous but still largely invisible "pivot" is about containing China, and what it might eventually mean if ever made real.

Criticism by friends and allies is nothing new. In US foreign policy, there never was a golden age of coherence, or for that matter domestic consensus, even when containment of the Soviet Union could justify everything from going to Vietnam to going to the moon. In others' eyes, Washington has always done too much or too little; been too pushy or failed to consult. That goes with the territory of being the world's major power. Today's anxieties, though, are on a different level. At least in the cold war no one doubted America's central purpose. Today many are in doubt. But are the criticisms well founded? Or, on closer look, is US foreign policy, as Mark Twain said of Wagner's music, better than it sounds?

2.

Five profound transformations packed into the short span since the end of the cold war in 1991 have set the conditions that the US wrestles with today. At first, the end of that conflict and the seeming triumph of democracy produced a burst of activity at the United Nations. By 1994, seventeen international peacekeeping missions were underway—more in one year than in all of the preceding half-century. Unlike earlier missions between established states, most of these involved

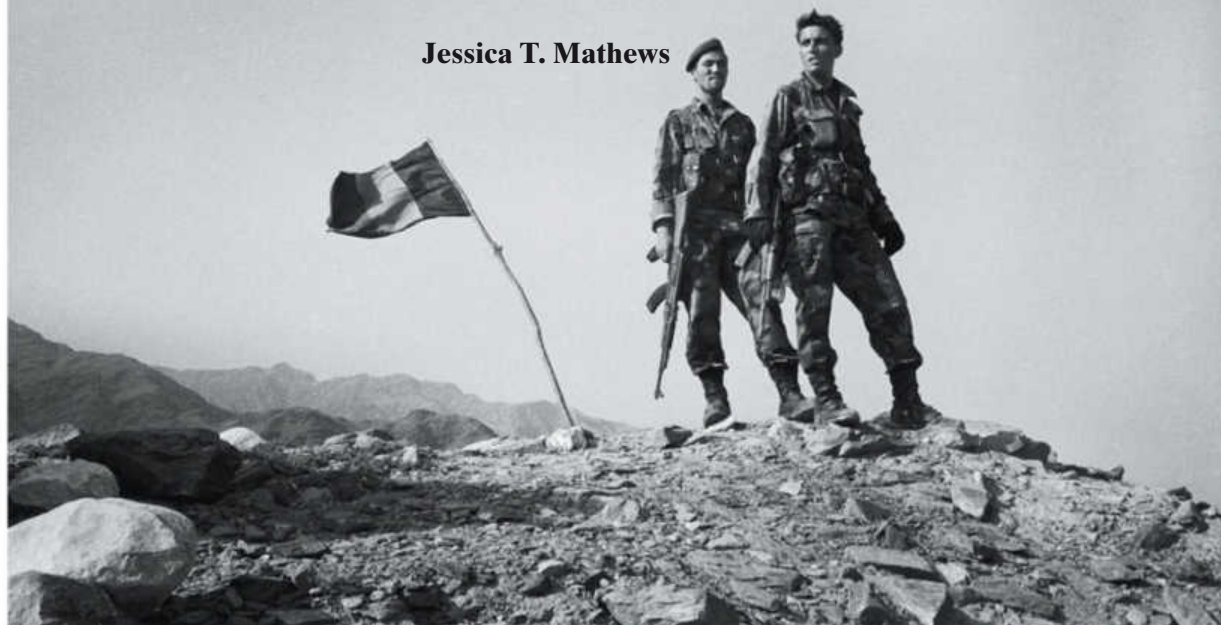
messy conflicts within a single state in places such as Rwanda, Georgia, and Haiti. Often there wasn't a real peace to keep, and humanitarian crises were woven into political-military ones. Not surprisingly, the outcomes were unsatisfactory, and as their number and costs rose, Washington grew disenchanted. It wasn't only peacekeeping that upset officials, but also a swarm of election-monitoring missions and of troublesome UN conferences (on the environment, social policy, women, etc.) with citizen activists playing major parts for the first time.

Increasingly annoyed, Washington demanded better performance and greater efficiency and tried to get it by first threatening to withhold and then withholding payment of its dues. By the mid-1990s, we were \$1.2 billion in arrears to the UN, \$200 million to the World Bank, \$95 million to the Food and Agriculture Organization, and \$40 million to the World Health Organization—all of them legal obligations. We owed another half-billion in voluntary pledges to regional development banks and the new Global Environment Facility. With the world's richest nation setting such an example, others soon followed. Just a few years after multilateral diplomacy had seemed to be a central pillar of what President George H.W. Bush called the "new world order," Washington had firmly turned its back and the UN teetered near bankruptcy.

Freed from the constraints of the cold war when military actions might end in a collision with the Soviet Union, the US turned more and more from diplomacy to its unparalleled military power. America has been engaged in conflict for nearly all of the past quarter-century, having undertaken nine military actions, including the two longest wars in its history. These two, in Iraq and Afghanistan, have also been by far the most expensive. Once engaged, the country was prepared to spend whatever seemed necessary, regardless of ballooning deficits. On top of the trillions spent on combat, the US has spent more on reconstruction in Afghanistan than it did on the

What Foreign Policy for the US?

Jessica T. Mathews



Afghan National Army soldiers on patrol with US Marines in Narang village, Kunar province, Afghanistan, 2005; photograph by Stephen Dupont from his book Generation AK: The Afghanistan Wars 1993–2012, to be published this month by Steidl

Contact Press Images

Marshall Plan (compared in real dollars)—with precious little to show for it.

In *The Right Way to Lose a War*, Dominic Tierney rates the results of the major wars since 1945 as one success (the 1991 Gulf War), two draws (Korea and Afghanistan), and two losses (Vietnam and Iraq)—a pretty dismal record. The disappearance of conventional interstate war, he argues, came at the worst possible time—at the peak of American military power—tempting the US to involve itself in the kinds of wars for which its military doctrines, arms, and training are poorly suited. Too often these conflicts have been "a limited war for us, and total war for them. We have more power; they have more willpower." Unfortunately, Tierney's attempts to define what kinds of actions the US *should* undertake, and ways to pursue them, such as attempting to "reverse engineer victory" in advance, fall flat.

These years have also been the age of globalization, a continuing sea change brought about by rapid economic, political, and, especially, technological change, happening simultaneously. In his useful primer, *Is the American Century Over?*, Joseph Nye brings the latter vividly into focus by noting that if Moore's law had applied to automobiles as well as to computing power, by 2000 a new car would have cost one one-thousandth of its 1970 price, or about fifteen to twenty dollars. But though globalization has been facilitated by technology, it is equally a set of institutional choices that were by no means inevitable.

Consider just a few of the major decisions of the 1990s: creation of the European Union and adoption of a common currency; transformation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), a set of rules, into the much more ambitious World Trade Organization with a far broader scope and membership; and, in a highly contentious step that would soon prove to be of enormous consequence, global agreement to transform the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty from a pact that would expire after twenty-five years to a permanent, global accord. These and other steps are major commitments to multinational problem-solving, involving significant concessions of national sovereignty.

By making borders porous to information, pollution, criminal activity, money, popular culture, foreign investment, and so on, globalization has made the job of national governments vastly harder. Security is harder to achieve and to maintain. Citizens know more about conditions elsewhere and make demands accordingly. Multinational corporations and financial institutions operate without much connection to the interests of their home country. And the demand for transnational problem-solving (though not the supply) keeps rising: climate change, cybersecurity, epidemics, and bank

regulation, to name just a few, demand attention.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, and America's subsequent Global War on Terror mark the beginning of the third transformation. September 11 tore away the sense of distance and difference that had shaped US history from the outset. Though the oceans had long since ceased to be the protection they once were, Americans still believed in the illusion. "Homeland security" is more than the profound changes in law, intelligence, government spending, and routines of daily life that it has imposed. It is the realization that the US is more like the rest of the world—vulnerable on its own territory—than it had been since 1812.

The pervasive sense of fear the September 11 attacks produced in the US made the invasion of Iraq possible. It is too soon to know the degree to which that war contributed to the Arab Awakening that followed. The events that spread from Tunisia to most of the Middle East were a reaction to decades of incompetent governance. But the upheavals of the Arab Awakening are now inseparable from sectarian and tribal conflicts that first erupted in Iraq following Saddam Hussein's removal. In turn, Iran was enormously empowered by America's defeat of the Iraqi dictator and of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Syria could become an ex-country; ISIS threatens to establish a religious caliphate from chunks of Syria, Iraq, and maybe elsewhere; the Kurds of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey may use the present chaos to achieve their dream of one or more Kurdish states; and the region as a whole, including places superficially at peace, is looking at Sunni-Shia conflict that will likely last a generation or more.

The post-cold war era has, as well, been defined by the accelerating growth of China, whose GDP has quintupled since 1990. As it grew by double digits, year after year, China was torn between its view of itself as a still poor and weak victim of past colonialism, and a growing sense of its burgeoning strength and unique economic achievements. Until Xi Jinping took power in 2012 the ambivalence was kept under a lid by continued fidelity to Deng Xiaoping's dictum "Hide your strength, bide your time." Xi has abandoned that restraint.

China may never want to overturn the world order from which it has profited so greatly, but it is no longer just a passive recipient of rules and arrangements made by the West. It is a rule-maker now, not just a rule-taker. After the US Congress refused for years to allow a long-overdue increase in China's voting share at the IMF, China answered by announcing a new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with itself the major funder. The US refused to join and then tried to block the new bank, failing miserably. Fifty-seven countries, including most of America's allies, cofounded the AIIB in June 2015. Even when a Chinese initiative is constructive, Washington can't quite accommodate itself to China's new status.

Finally, Washington must contend with the aftermath of Russia's sudden loss of its empire, its decision—at least for now—to turn away from a place for itself in the West, and the bitter feelings

of aggrieved nationalism fed so effectively by President Putin's propaganda machine. At the end of the cold war, two thirds of Russians saw America either as a friend (51 percent) or an ally (16 percent). Less than 2 percent saw it as hostile. Today, the US and NATO top the list of "Russia's enemies" and 81 percent of Russians hold negative views of America.

Between these extremes, in Russian eyes, lies the history of NATO's eastward expansion, particularly President George W. Bush's urging that NATO should one day welcome Georgia and Ukraine, and the "color" revolutions in these two states and Kazakhstan that Russians (wrongly) saw as a US-inspired conspiracy against them. This same history includes US military actions over Kosovo and in Iraq. As significant has been Russia's inability to address its own failings and move toward Western standards of living and the rule of law. Russians can see for themselves that their country is no longer a great power. But at least after Crimea and still in Ukraine, Putin has given them the satisfaction of seeing Russia once again a power to be reckoned with.

3.

There is no principle that can provide strategic clarity or unity of purpose to these diverse challenges. The cold war was an aberration in having such a single goal: a filter through which every issue was passed before being considered on its own merits. Americans will have to learn to live without a replacement for containment—the sooner the better. But at least in theory, the US should be able to develop broad domestic agreement about what it can expect of itself abroad, what developments are its responsibility, and what kinds of things it should not attempt.

Defining such choices is Ian Bremmer's laudable goal in *Superpower*. He describes three possible choices for America's role—Indispensable, Moneyball, and Independent. The first is roughly the US's current position; it is equally committed to advancing its security interests and its values—especially democracy and human rights—broadly around the world. "Moneyball foreign policy" is "a cold-blooded, interest-driven approach that redefines America's role in the world in a way designed to maximize the return on the taxpayer's investment." Such an America would shed "burdens in favor of opportunities" and would "never go to war to defend a principle." Independent America amounts to sweeping disengagement from the world with a drastic refocus on domestic priorities.

Unfortunately, too many errors and inconsistencies in how the choices are defined sap the book's value. Bremmer writes that "the gap between US and Chinese defense spending grows wider in America's favor every day." Of course, the reverse is true, as a footnote reports. As evidence of supposed incoherence he asserts that Iran took as the lesson of the US invasion of Iraq that it had better "develop a nuclear weapon as quickly as possible." In fact Iran's nuclear weapons program began more than a decade earlier and in the opinion of US intelligence was actually suspended in 2003. The need to "rationalize military spending" by

devoting more resources to "lighter, smarter weapons" needed to combat new threats is an element of the Independent America strategy, but would fit just as well with both of the others. A devastating critique of American exceptionalism is part of the Moneyball strategy, but could just as easily describe Independent America. And so on.

Bremmer's own choice, for odd and largely unsupported reasons, is Independent America. He thinks, without in any way attempting to prove it, that our current foreign policy is "prohibitively expensive." He asserts that the American people "don't care" about most of what the US seeks to achieve abroad. The "significant damage" that would be done to relations with the likes of Japan, Israel, and Britain is ac-



Sanaa, Yemen, 2007

ceptable, and China will find its own direction anyway. Whereas the Moneyball approach would demand "sacrificing our values," somehow writing off the rest of the world is all right as Independent America would "find a brave new purpose for those values." That purpose, neither brave nor particularly new, would be spending more at home, cutting taxes, and demonstrating to the rest of the world that our democracy is best by moving "beyond petty partisan fights...to forge...intelligent [legislative] compromises." How that distant goal would emerge from international disengagement is unexplained. Least understandably to any newspaper reader, he concludes that "there may one day be greater demand...from others, for US international leadership. That day is not on the horizon."

Restraint, by Barry Posen, ends in much the same place by an entirely different route. An MIT professor, Posen has written a tightly argued, impeccably sourced, and lucid case for a new American national security strategy. Though written by an expert for experts, it is an accessible read. No term is undefined, no assumption unspecified, and no assertion not carefully supported. Interestingly, he points out, I think correctly, that Democrats and Republicans, who seem to disagree on everything, have actually been united for decades in a consensus favoring an assertive foreign and security policy. In his view, that policy is "unnecessary, counterproductive, costly, and wasteful." What divides the two parties is only their "attitudes toward inter-

national institutions. Democrats like them, Republicans do not." He dubs this consensus Liberal Hegemony—hegemonic because it "builds on the great power advantage of the United States...and intends to preserve as much of that advantage as possible," and liberal "because it aims to defend and promote...values associated with...the US...including democratic governance within nation-states, individual rights, free markets, a free press, and the rule of law."

Posen's strategy would focus on just three limited goals: maintaining a balance of power in Eurasia, managing (not halting) nuclear proliferation, and going after terrorist groups "that choose the US as a target." It would insist that US allies spend what is necessary to defend themselves and renounce aims that have proved unachievable, including "the coercive reform and political reorganization of other countries." "Peoples must find their own way to democracy," he reasonably observes. "The practice of democracy is inevitably tailored to the history of each people."

There is a large overlap with Bremmer's Indispensable America in Posen's call for a drastically pared-back, realist security policy, and a strong echo of Tierney's overreach argument too. But the conviction that the US should seek a liberal hegemony still dominates. On the campaign trail the only point of agreement you'll hear among eighteen of the twenty candidates for president of both parties (excluding Ron Paul and Bernie Sanders) is that America "must lead." Few Americans find anything jarring in politicians' familiar rhetoric on America's divine purpose; few can imagine how American lectures to non-Americans on how they must change this or that policy can sound like chalk on a blackboard.

Valerie Hudson and Patricia Leidl's *The Hillary Doctrine* is a good example of where this kind of thinking leads. The supposed doctrine is a statement often made by Mrs. Clinton as secretary of state that "the subjugation of women is a direct threat to...the national security of our country." "There is a one-to-one correspondence," Hudson and Leidl repeatedly claim, "between countries of greatest concern to the United States and countries in which women are treated poorly." Only a moment's thought is needed to demolish this relationship. Russia, of great security concern, does not subjugate women. India is not a security threat but has terrible conditions for women, including arranged marriage for children, unequal education, prenatal sex selection, frequent rape, etc. Still, they argue, the status of women should be a core concern of US national security policy and justifies American demands for radical change in other countries and cultures.

4.

What, then, should we make of US foreign policy? There are, first, good reasons why it is not as sharply defined as it once was. The world is moving, very fast, from a half-century of unusual stasis to something else—though exactly what is not yet clear. The discipline of the cold war that forced most states to choose sides and follow their leader is gone. The economic dominance the US once had is gone because Washington

wisely used its influence to stimulate others' growth. The US is still the sole military superpower, but with dangerous new vulnerabilities. Cyberattacks, the increase in Islamic terrorism, and the quickening spread of technology have diffused the capacity to do serious damage from great powers to weak and failing states and to nonstate actors.

Attitudes have changed more slowly. Being a lone superpower is harder, and harder for others to accept, than being one of two. Mistakes and overreaching that would be forgiven in a mortal conflict are not forgiven now. The triumphalism that followed the American victory in the cold war was short-lived in its acute form, but it lingers in outsized expectations on the part of both Americans and non-Americans of what the US can do and should do. Events everywhere in the world are taken as "tests" of American resolve that echo globally. An Iraqi politician, caught in the vicious morass that followed the invasion, with American soldiers dying at a steady pace, told me with absolute conviction: "You went to the moon. We know you could fix this if you wanted to."

Today, the chaos in the Middle East, according to *The Economist*, "is trashing human rights and torching values that many, including this newspaper, look to America to defend." Whether any foreign power can fix what is broken there, whether it is America's responsibility to try, and if so, exactly why that is so are all questions that lack satisfactory answers. Three are most often offered: the US should take the lead because of American exceptionalism; due to fear (defeat threats abroad

to prevent attacks at home); or because there is no one else. None of these can be expanded into a convincing foreign policy that assigns priorities but also says no to some things. Without such a frame, the sense that there are *no* limits on possible US action, rather than a genuine desire to turn inward, is what is leading analysts, I suspect, to call for a 180-degree reversal of the US policies of the past several decades.

Overuse of the military, which accounts for more than 90 percent of all US spending abroad, is also, in part, to blame. Twenty-five years in which there have been few months when US forces were not actively engaged somewhere has created a world that expects US interventions and encourages friends and allies to underspend on their own defense, enlarging the need for US help.

The original version of President Eisenhower's admonition warned against the "military-industrial-congressional complex." He had it right. The US could ease painful shortfalls in military pay and training and buy more security for less than it currently spends. It is not primarily the Pentagon that prevents this, but Congress. For all of the post-cold war era, under both political parties, we have tolerated enormous waste in the Pentagon budget and consistently underspent, in both money and effort, on all the other tools of foreign policy. The ratio of defense spending to all other foreign operations has stayed pretty constant at sixteen to one.

But the greatest bar to developing a more coherent foreign policy has been the deepening partisan polarization

in Washington and the closely linked politicization of foreign policy. No one expects the Senate to be able to ratify an important treaty anymore. International efforts to reach binding agreements—on climate, for example—have to work around this restriction, an extraordinary weakness for the world's leading power. Economically, as former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers has wryly noted, when you have "one of our major parties opposed to...trade agreements and the other...resistant to funding international organizations, the United States will not be in a position to shape the global economic system."

Ruled by the need to raise more and more money and crippled by Tea Party members for whom compromise is an evil, Congress has become increasingly paralyzed and unserious about deadly serious matters. The debate over the nuclear deal with Iran, more than any I can recall of comparable importance to the national interest, puts partisanship, politics (read campaign funding), and wildly inflated rhetoric over substance. The principal criticisms are not of the deal that has been reached, but of any deal. Opponents bristle at the charge that defeating the deal would make war more likely, but in fact, it is true.

The notion that the US could reject this deal and negotiate a stronger one is fanciful. Imagine the offer: "We (alone among our negotiating partners) have decided that the agreed-upon deal is unsatisfactory. Please return to the table where we will insist on tougher provisions." That leaves only two possibilities—an Iran free of any limits or war.

A reminder from history is relevant here. In 2003, when the US had 150,000 soldiers across Iran's border and Iran had just three hundred centrifuges, Washington insisted on a no-centrifuges deal and Iran walked away. Iran today has 19,000 centrifuges, vastly more technology, and is a few months from having enough fissile material for a bomb. By definition a compromise, the deal is not perfect. But compared to the available alternatives, it should not be a close call.

The tone and the misleading content of the debate could have a lasting impact. Iran will test the agreement in ways small and large. The deal's successful implementation will demand constant, high-level, friendly attention from both the administration and Congress. An incumbent who had campaigned against it without restraint, or a Congress more intent on vilifying the deal than making it work (think Obamacare), could easily cause it to fail not in Tehran but in Washington.*

Scholars and experts can prompt some rethinking on where America's limits should be drawn in a world drastically changed from the one that shaped our experience. Only elected officials can turn that into a national discussion of the interests and values the US wants to support and perhaps a new, shared sense of America's national purpose abroad. □

*For an example of how a seemingly serious but incorrect charge of weakness in the agreement has arisen, see Mark Hibbs and Thomas Shea, "No, Iran Is Not Allowed to Inspect Itself," *The Hill*, August 21, 2015.

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Lives & Loves of the Exile

Edward Mendelson

Nicolas Nabokov:
A Life in Freedom and Music
by Vincent Giroud.
Oxford University Press,
562 pp., \$39.95

Nicolas Nabokov was a Russian composer, exiled at sixteen, a year and a half after the October Revolution, and best known for his career as secretary-general of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an international organization created in 1950 for the purpose of sponsoring festivals, conferences, and magazines that would exemplify Western artistic and intellectual freedom in contrast with Soviet censorship and conformity. Nabokov brought unique gifts of energy and generosity to the job. Working for the congress—often working against his bureaucratic colleagues—he conceived and organized the first large-scale international festival of music, drama, and the arts, a far more complex and ambitious affair than pre-war local festivals like those presented at Salzburg or Glyndebourne. He opened everything he organized to composers and artists who worked in every contemporary style, including those he privately disliked. He sustained lifelong friendships in four languages, and was loved and admired by friends as various as Isaiah Berlin, George Kennan, Mary McCarthy, Leontyne Price, Igor Stravinsky, and W. H. Auden.

Then, in the 1960s, the Congress for Cultural Freedom was revealed to have been funded secretly by the CIA, and for the next fifty years received wisdom has judged everyone involved as either a willing agent or an unwilling dupe of American imperialism. Vincent Giroud's nuanced and scrupulously documented *Nicolas Nabokov* overturns that judgment, and brings into clearer focus a contentious episode in cold war history. Its deeper implications include new ways of thinking about the psychology of exile and its effect on twentieth-century art and culture.

Nabokov's first cousin Vladimir Nabokov, born four years before him, was also exiled in adolescence, but the two responded to exile in diametrically opposed ways, each choosing a different life path, like brothers in a timeless myth. Exiled at an age when adolescents typically construct their personality from a combination of their inner impulses and the norms and conventions of their surrounding culture, each was forced to create himself in his own way, in the sudden absence of the culture that had sustained them in childhood.

1.

Nicolas Nabokov was born in 1903 to a family of wealthy liberal intellectuals. He spoke Russian to his father, French to his mother, English to one governess, and German to another. One day he had his "first musical shock" when he heard his mother play a Rachmaninov prelude on the piano, and he resolved to be a musician. Later, looking back to his childhood, as Giroud reports,

what remained in Nabokov's memory was a prelapsarian universe, in which music took possession of him—as he saw it—not through dry piano exercises, but naturally, through the "open window" which let him absorb the sounds, smells, and rhythms of the surrounding world.

After his family fled the revolution, Nabokov studied music in Germany and France, paying his way with private lessons in music and languages and with music reviews for a Russian émigré newspaper. As his own compositions began to be performed, he found his way into social circles as varied as Count Harry Kessler's louche entourage and Jacques Maritain's spiritual devotees. Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Nabokov's first ballet, *Ode*, for the Ballets Russes when he was twenty-five. Looking for work during the Depression, he got himself invited to America by Albert C. Barnes to lecture at the Barnes Foundation, then, at thirty-three, began his first regular academic job at Wells College in upstate New York in 1936.

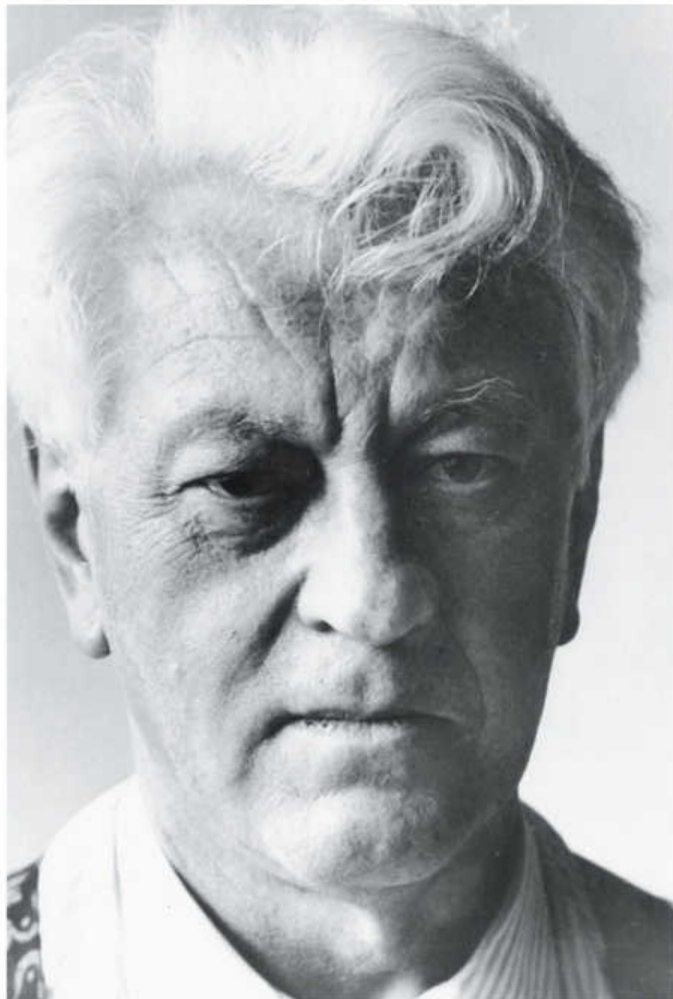
At Wells he got his start as an impresario by organizing student productions of *Oedipus the King*, *Samson Agonistes*, *Androcles and the Lion*, and *The Tempest* with choruses and incidental music that he composed for the occasion. "It was an admirable collective effort," he wrote later, "the closest I had come to see the workings of a true 'commune,' although none of us dreamt of calling it that way."

He enjoyed his work at Wells but felt restless in its provincial isolation. So in 1941 he left for St. John's College in Annapolis; while there he spent much of his time in cosmopolitan Washington, though he also organized a student choir and an orchestra comprised of students and local musicians. His teaching methods—and his insistence on organizing a schedule-disrupting student production of *The Tempest*—provoked conflicts with the college authorities, and for the rest of his life he continued to annoy bureaucrats with his artistic and intellectual passions.

He had been attracted to St. John's by its "great books" program, which seemed to embody something resembling the devotion to literature and art that he had enjoyed at home in Russia. But he soon questioned the curriculum of exactly one hundred books ("a straight-jacket for the mind") and the Socratic method prescribed for teaching them. The Socratic method, he found, can teach students to recognize their own ignorance but can be worse than useless for teaching them anything else; in practice, it leaves them trapped in the teacher's preconceptions. When the college dean ordered Nabokov to use the Socratic method to teach music,

a subject about which his students already knew they knew nothing, Nabokov forced a confrontation in his classroom that left the dean humiliated.

In 1940, by "an accident of fate," Nabokov met the young diplomat Charles Bohlen, who had worked in the American embassy in Moscow. Bohlen brought him into a circle of diplomats, led by George Kennan, who later did much to shape American cold war policy. In the last months of World War II, W. H. Auden insisted that Nabokov



Nicolas Nabokov, New York City, 1965;
photograph by Gjon Mili

join him in the US Strategic Bombing Survey, a quasi-military unit that was studying the effect of Allied bombing on civilian morale. This brought Nabokov to occupied Germany, where he later found work in a branch of military government that controlled German theater, music, and film. Back in America in the late 1940s, with an increasing sense that he was morally obliged to work against all forms of totalitarianism, he allied himself with the anti-Communist left, writing essays on music and politics for *Partisan Review* and Dwight Macdonald's magazine *Politics* and working with Mary McCarthy to set up exchanges between liberals in Europe and America.

An international conference on the arts in Berlin in 1950 led to the creation of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, based in Paris, with an unimpeachable list of honorary chairmen that included Benedetto Croce, John Dewey, Karl Jaspers, Bertrand Russell, and Jacques Maritain. Nabokov's diplomatic and artistic record made him the obvious choice to lead the congress, and for the next fifteen years he reigned, in Stravinsky's phrase, as "culture generalissimo" of the non-Communist West.

2.

Nabokov's personality, and the style of his music, had by now taken shape. He was gregarious, expansive, alert to the style and manner of everyone around him, "a superb mimic, in at least four languages" (said George Kennan), "an irresistible source of torrential wit and fancy, immensely sociable" (said Isaiah Berlin). He responded to exile by opening himself as a focus of warmth and welcome, so rich in words and energy that only a few friends seem to have noticed the wound inflicted by his exile, the absence of something central, deep within himself.

His intellectual integrity was passionate and unwavering, but his relations with others, though extravagantly generous, seldom seemed to have had the intimacy made possible by a focused, cohesive selfhood—what Virginia Woolf called in *Mrs. Dalloway* "something central which permeated." He said of himself in his late book of stories and recollections, *Bagázh: Memoirs of a Russian Cosmopolitan* (1975), "as Ariel says, my wish was and is 'to please.'" In his book, he describes himself and his friends in the broad strokes of a friendly caricaturist or raconteur. Everyone, including himself, lives on the surface; no one shows the outer signs of an inner life.

One of the elements that seems to have held Nabokov's personality together—and gave force to his intellectual integrity—was the contrast he remembered from childhood between two styles of Russian Orthodox church music, the "cheap adaptations of popular tunes from Italian opera"

sung at most services (Giroud's description) and the "authentic Russian chant traditions" heard only at Christmas and Easter. Nabokov's early aesthetic judgment between right and wrong kinds of music grew into his adult moral judgment between right and wrong ways of thinking about culture and politics.

The few available recordings of his music, and Giroud's reports of other works, suggest that his style combined an underlying late-Romantic Russian lyricism with surface details chosen from an eclectic range of sources. His ballet *Don Quixote* (1965), commissioned by George Balanchine, opens in twelve-tone style, then proceeds in the manner of the great Russian ballets, inflected with brief echoes from seventeenth-century composers and Stravinsky, the composer whom he most revered. Stravinsky, too, evoked four centuries of musical style, but chose a single ancient or modern style to echo in a single work, while Nabokov combined in one work as many as a dozen different styles. Nabokov's most intense and personal works (at least among those I have heard) are his least eclectic, notably his 1966 settings, in a modern Russian style, of lyrics from

Dominique Nabokov Archives/Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York

Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*, poems of loss provoked by Stalinist terror.¹

Witold Gombrowicz, who liked Nabokov without being dazzled by his charm, wrote what he called a "psychoanalysis" of the "cynical, lyrical aspects" of his character and art:

The difficulty comes from your being an amalgam: you are never "within" something, but always "in between." For example, you are between the spirit and the senses; between East (Russia) and West (Paris-Rome); between music and the theater; between music and words; between culture and primitivism; between art and life, etc., and there always is something in you that is a pretext for something else....

Now, it seems to me that this antinomic structure of your personality, which condemns you to be in between realities, cultures, and styles, is basically contrary to the trends (now fashionable) toward the "purified" and the abstract. But your situation may well be far richer in possibilities.

Of Nabokov's opera *Rasputin's End* (1959), Gombrowicz wrote: "One feels you are so close to your doomed hero by some kind of underground demagoguery."

Nabokov's erotic life, until he was around sixty, seems, from Giroud's account, to have had the same promiscu-

ous generosity as his friendships. He married five times; his first three wives seem to have been as uninterested in monogamy as he was, and two stayed on friendly terms with him for the rest of their lives. Giroud reports recurring sequences of marriages, affairs, depressions, divorces, and more affairs. In *Bagáz* Nabokov calls himself "an inveterate (but consecutive) polygamist"; he dedicated the book to his fifth wife, with whom he seems at last to have turned monogamous.

The obscure absence at the center of himself seems to have been linked both to his good-natured polygamy and his recurring depressions that made so deep a contrast with the "light and laughter in a dark age" that gave pleasure to his friends. Giroud briefly records Nabokov's depressions without describing them, but they seem at times to have been episodes of chaos and melodrama. Stephen Spender, who wrote the libretto for *Rasputin's End*, told of a working visit to Nabokov when he "swept all the food and the cutlery off the table in front of him and buried his head in his arms. Glasses and porcelain lay broken around his feet, but he paid no attention. He was weeping uncontrollably."²

Meanwhile, his cousin Vladimir had responded to exile and the loss of a surrounding culture by constructing an entirely different kind of personality, one that was inward, autonomous, and sharply focused on a vision of beauty remembered from his Russian adoles-

cence. (The cousins collaborated once, on a musical setting of a lyric by Pushkin that Vladimir translated into English.) While Nicolas was pursuing his many affairs, Vladimir remained intensely attached to his wife, Véra (despite at least one affair in the 1930s). Nicolas recreated through his festival-organizing and his music the shared artistic culture of his childhood—Giroud reproduces a group portrait of Nicolas and his siblings as a string quartet—while Vladimir found perfection and beauty in the solitary act of writing and the inhuman world of butterflies.

Critics admire the aesthetic perfection of Vladimir's novels but tend to neglect their moral and psychological genius. Vladimir's two greatest books are warnings to himself, studies in the price he would have paid had he tried (somewhat as his cousin Nicolas had tried) to make real in his present-day life the vision of beauty he had seen long ago in Russia. *Lolita* tells the story of a polyglot émigré who embraces what he takes to be an embodiment of his lost youthful vision in the person of an adolescent American girl. As Humbert Humbert recalls only once (the point needs to be made only once), the result is "her sobs in the night—every night, every night—the moment I feigned sleep." *Pale Fire* records the madness that another polyglot émigré, Charles Kinbote, sinks into when he finds in a poem written by an American, in the style of Robert Frost, a secret allegory of Kinbote's banishment from the distant, possibly imaginary, country where he had once been king. For Kinbote, whose real name may or may not be Vseslav, a work of art made in the West, which says nothing about

the East, can become (as if performed at some international festival) a weapon in his private campaign to regain his eastern kingdom from its usurpers.

3.

The Congress for Cultural Freedom was funded from the start with money from the CIA funneled through a foundation created for the purpose under the nominal control of Julius ("Junkie") Fleischmann, a millionaire who had worked in naval intelligence. Whoever chose Fleischmann for this role may have had an unconscious wish to signal something fishy about the Farfield Foundation and its munificence, because Fleischmann was notoriously and exaggeratedly stingy.

The congress quickly established offices in more than thirty countries and was most visible through its influential and intellectually distinguished magazines: *Encounter* in Britain, *Preuves* in France, *Quadrant* in Australia, and *Cuadernos* published in Paris for a Latin American readership. *Der Monat* in Germany was allied with the congress but not officially associated with it, having been begun a few years earlier by Melvin Lasky, an ex-Trotskyite—"clever, devious philistine," Stephen Spender wrote—who was one of the CIA-connected founders of the congress and was later, with Spender, a coeditor of *Encounter*. Spender made *Encounter's* pages about literature and the arts lively and inclusive, while his coeditors, first Irving Kristol, then Lasky, followed a strong anti-Communist line in its pages about

¹They may be heard online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSRsCqIiKN4.

²Matthew Spender, *A House in St. John's Wood: In Search of My Parents*, to be published later this year by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

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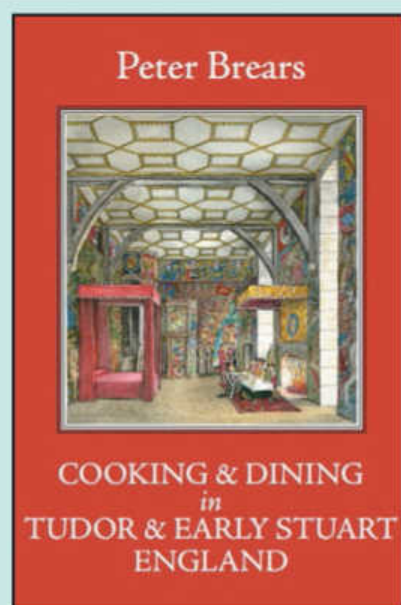


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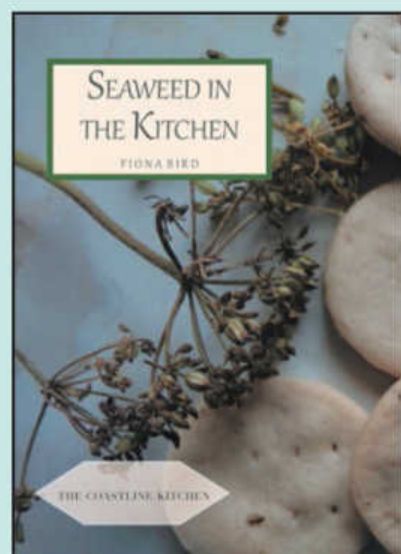
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politics, which seldom criticized American policy.

Rumors and suspicions about the congress's funding began early. In 1955 William Empson was writing furious letters to and about *Encounter* denouncing it as an organ of American propaganda pretending to be British. Lasky and the congress's "administrative secretary" Michael Josselson took orders from the CIA, but kept assuring Spender and Nabokov that the rumors and accusations were untrue.

Giroud draws no conclusion about the extent of Nabokov's knowledge of the congress's funding, but he reports many episodes in which Nabokov got into disputes with his CIA-connected colleagues about festivals he was organizing in Europe and Asia. Nabokov typically wanted to invite Eastern European composers and musicians in the hope of encouraging anyone who might deviate from the Communist Party's socialist-realist line. His colleagues insisted on maintaining ideological purity by excluding everyone on the far side of the Iron Curtain.

Around 1960 Nabokov became increasingly aware of the congress's connections with the CIA and began to distance himself from it, partly by taking on an exhausting second job as director of the Berlin Festival, which he reorganized and expanded. When the funding scandal broke, in a sequence of partial disclosures that began in 1962 and culminated in 1966 in a series of articles in *The New York Times*, Nabokov and Spender were widely criticized in literary gossip and the press, first for having worked for the congress, then for their oversimplifying public denials that they knew about its funding.

The psychological reality—invisible in press reports—seems to have been that both were likely to have been aware that the money came from a source that had a clear geopolitical agenda (although Spender's son Matthew concludes in a new book that his father had been the CIA's "dupe"). Both firmly believed the funds were being used for a good purpose and both also had the quality that Gombrowicz noted in Nabokov of carrying on "between realities." They had strong reasons to work against the Soviet Union, Spender having long since repented his brief youthful membership in the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The CIA made use of the writers, musicians, directors, and artists who contributed to the congress's magazines and performed in its festivals, and evidently assumed it was using Nabokov to further its agenda. But to the degree that Nabokov was aware of where the money came from, he seems likely to have thought of himself as using the CIA, or whoever was behind the Fairfield Foundation, to carry out his own artistic ideals. As Spender observed (as recalled by his son), Nabokov was "hard to control, for his feud with Soviet Russia, and with [Soviet] Russian music, was personal"—but it was not a quest for revenge. "Nicky wasn't mourning a lost society that had pampered the Nabokov family. He was a fighter for a civilization that had been violently destroyed."

Nabokov later said that the whole apparatus of secrecy had been pointless and self-defeating from the start. The British Council and the Alliance Française, he pointed out, publicly and without embarrassment did what the CIA chose to do clandestinely. Commenting

in the 1960s on the Berlin conference of 1950 that gave rise to the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Nabokov wrote one of the most telling comments on the entire affair:

Had the American government *then* had the courage and foresight to establish a worldwide fund out of "counterpart currencies" to subsidize legally and overtly—as did the Marshall Plan in the domain of economic reconstruction—the indispensable anti-Stalinist, anti-Communist, and, in general, anti-totalitarian cultural activities of the Cold War, the whole ugly mess of 1966...would not have taken place.



George Balanchine, Stephen Spender, and Nicolas Nabokov, Princeton, New Jersey, 1966; photograph by Dominique Nabokov

Giroud writes that after the secret funding was disclosed Nabokov's position "was that introducing an element of deceit in the intellectual arena, where truth and honesty should be paramount, had resulted in compromising the very cause that was being fought for."

George Kennan put a different face on the matter. "The flap about CIA money was quite unwarranted," he told a friend. "I never felt the slightest pangs of conscience about it.... This country has no ministry of culture, and CIA was obliged to do what it could to try to fill the gap."

The arts have always had vexed relations with the money that pays for them. The cash that built the museum, the concert hall, the ballet theater, the university campus, was probably the fruit of cruelty, exploitation, and theft, but the blood and dirt was laundered out of it from one generation to the next until it smelled sweet. Everyone agrees to ask no questions about its past; the audience represses its guilt about the ugly source of its refined pleasures. The pious horror that erupts when incompletely laundered money is revealed to have paid for something elegant and beautiful is the return of the repressed. The horrified furiously project their hidden guilt onto a conveniently visible offender. Civilization may or may not require sexual repression, as Freud insisted it does, but it often seems to require repression of knowledge of where the money comes from.

4.

Vincent Giroud's biography of Nabokov is lucid, readable, and judiciously

affectionate toward its subject, though sometimes exasperated with his bad memory for dates. The notes quietly document errors in earlier scholarship, and the book avoids speculation where documents are lacking.

Giroud says little about Nabokov's emotional response to the 1966 scandal over the CIA, but his book leaves openings for reading between the lines. Nabokov seems to have experienced something like the feelings that Spender privately reported to friends about his own experience of the scandal. The only person, Spender said, who had fully supported him at the time was his wife Natasha, and whatever temptations he might sometimes feel, he could never leave her. Nabokov,

when the crisis occurred, had been living for two years with Dominique Cibiel, a talented young French photographer, later his fifth wife (her portraits of writers appear frequently in these pages), and he seems to have abandoned what he called his consecutive polygamy during the twelve years he spent with her afterward, until his death in 1978.

Auden remarked of Nabokov at the time he was working for the congress that he had not fulfilled his talents because "he cannot bear to be long enough alone." Now that Nabokov had left public life, Auden—characteristically masking sympathy with brusqueness—pressured him into composing an opera based on Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* for which Auden and Chester Kallman wrote the libretto. Auden seems to have used Shakespeare's plot as a gently instructive allegory of Nabokov's career and the direction Auden thought it should now take: as the opera begins, the king and his courtiers hope to build an enlightened community, but they are distracted by love until, at the end, a sudden revelation of mortality startles them into a year of voluntary, contemplative solitude. Nabokov composed the opera in a mood of "continuous pleasure," undistracted by the task of getting other people's music performed at festivals.

In the years after the premiere of *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1973 Nabokov finally completed his memoirs, and found time to make frequent journeys to Jerusalem, "the only city I really love." In his last years he was, with unexpected serenity, becoming himself. □

Slavery: The ISIS Rules

Introduction

Modern slavery takes many forms, but most slaves are forced to work in the shadows. Those who control modern slaves—whether men compelled to work on Thai fishing boats, domestic workers trapped in the homes of their Saudi employers, children ordered to beg in Senegal, bonded workers in India, or sex workers trafficked in the West—usually shun publicity because treating human beings as mere chattel can be criminally prosecuted and cause moral revulsion.

The self-proclaimed Islamic State, or ISIS, is a rare exception. Much as it openly flouts the global prohibition of summary execution, often with unspeakable cruelty, it has published an attempt to justify its subjugation of non-Muslim women and girls in sexual bondage. Its argument is not an academic exercise: Human Rights Watch has interviewed Yazidi women and girls who have escaped ISIS captivity. They describe a system of organized rape and sexual assault, sexual slavery, and forced marriage.

The excerpts from the ISIS pamphlet printed below—posted on a pro-ISIS Twitter account and generally considered authentic—use a question-and-answer format to set forth rules for having sex with captured and enslaved women and girls who are not Muslim.* What is striking is that, in the minds of its authors, this is not a lawless document. It sets forth an interpretation of sharia, or Islamic law, albeit an extreme one. Far from pure licentiousness, it is filled with legal constraints. Yet by treating captured non-Muslim women as subject to the sexual whims of those who control them, ISIS disregards nearly universal injunctions against slavery and rape.

The ISIS pamphlet does not mean that its members who enslave and rape women necessarily act with Islam in mind. Like any ruthless group, ISIS undoubtedly includes many who are attracted by the opportunity to subjugate and brutalize others regardless of the rationalization. Yet ISIS's effort to justify its conduct through sharia law highlights the importance of countering this legal claim, both by those qualified to speak for Islamic law and by those able to enforce the prohibitions of international human rights law.

—Kenneth Roth
Executive Director
Human Rights Watch

Question 1: What is al-sabi?

Al-Sabi is a woman from among *ahl al-harb* [the people of war] who has been captured by Muslims.

*The text, which follows the Twitter version precisely, is available at www.memrijttm.org. See also the Human Rights Watch report “Iraq: ISIS Escapes Describe Systematic Rape,” April 14, 2015, as well as the story by Rukmini Callimachi, “ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2015.

Question 2: What makes al-sabi permissible?

What makes *al-sabi* permissible [i.e., what makes it permissible to take such a woman captive] is [her] unbelief. Unbelieving [women] who were captured and brought into the abode of Islam are permissible to us, after the imam distributes them [among us].

Question 3: Can all unbelieving women be taken captive?

There is no dispute among the scholars that it is permissible to capture unbelieving women [who are characterized by] original unbelief [*kufr asli*], such



Yazidi sisters who escaped from ISIS captivity and are now living in the Sharya refugee camp, Duhok Province, Iraq, July 3, 2015

as the *kitabiyat* [women from among the People of the Book, i.e., Jews and Christians] and polytheists. However, [the scholars] are disputed over [the issue of] capturing apostate women. The consensus leans toward forbidding it, though some people of knowledge think it permissible. We [ISIS] lean toward accepting the consensus....

Question 4: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive?

It is permissible to have sexual intercourse with the female captive. Allah the almighty said: “[Successful are the believers] who guard their chastity, except from their wives or (the captives and slaves) that their right hands possess, for then they are free from blame [Koran 23:5–6].”...

Question 5: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive immediately after taking possession [of her]?

If she is a virgin, he [her master] can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first]....

Question 6: Is it permissible to sell a female captive?

It is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of as long as that doesn't cause [the Muslim *ummah*] any harm or damage.

Question 7: Is it permissible to separate a mother from her children through [the act of] buying and selling?

It is not permissible to separate a mother from her prepubescent children through buying, selling, or giving away [a captive or slave]. [But] it is permissible to separate them if the children are grown and mature.

Question 8: If two or more [men] buy a female captive together, does she then become [sexually] permissible to each of them?

It is forbidden to have intercourse with a female captive if [the master] does

Question 13: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female slave who has not reached puberty?

It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse; however if she is not fit for intercourse, then it is enough to enjoy her without intercourse.

Question 14: What private parts of the female slave's body must be concealed during prayer?

Her private body parts [that must be concealed] during prayer are the same as those [that must be concealed] outside [prayer], and they [include] everything besides the head, neck, hands, and feet.

Question 15: May a female slave meet foreign men without wearing a hijab?

A female slave is allowed to expose her head, neck, hands, and feet in front of foreign men if *fitna* [enticement] can be avoided. However, if *fitna* is present, or if there is fear that it will occur, then it [i.e., exposing these body parts becomes] forbidden.

Question 16: Can two sisters be taken together while taking slaves?

It is permissible to have two sisters, a female slave and her aunt [her father's sister], or a female slave and her aunt [from her mother's side]. But they cannot be together during intercourse, [and] whoever has intercourse with one of them cannot have intercourse with the other, due to the general [consensus] over the prohibition of this.

Question 17: What is al-'azl?

Al-'azl is refraining from ejaculating on a woman's pudendum [i.e., coitus interruptus].

Question 18: May a man use the al-'azl [technique] with his female slave?

A man is allowed [to use] *al-'azl* during intercourse with his female slave with or without her consent.

Question 19: Is it permissible to beat a female slave?

It is permissible to beat the female slave as a [form of] *darb ta'deeb* [disciplinary beating], [but] it is forbidden to [use] *darb al-takseer* [literally, breaking beating], [*darb al-tashaffi*] [beating for the purpose of achieving gratification], or [*darb al-ta'dheeb*] [torture beating]. Further, it is forbidden to hit the face.

Question 20: What is the ruling regarding a female slave who runs away from her master?

A male or female slave's running away [from their master] is among the gravest of sins....

Question 21: What is the earthly punishment of a female slave who runs away from her master?

She [i.e., the female slave who runs away from her master] has no punishment according to the sharia of Allah;

however, she is [to be] reprimanded [in such a way that] deters others like her from escaping.

Question 22: Is it permissible to marry a Muslim [slave] or a kitabiyya [i.e., Jewish or Christian] female slave?

It is impermissible for a free [man] to marry Muslim or *kitabiyat* female slaves, except for those [men] who

feared to [commit] a sin, that is, the sin of fornication....

Question 24: If a man marries a female slave who is owned by someone else, who is allowed to have intercourse with her?

A master is prohibited from having intercourse with his female slave who is married to someone else; instead, the master receives her service, [while] the

husband [gets to] enjoy her [sexually].

Question 25: Are the huddoud [Koranic punishments] applied to female slaves?

If a female slave committed what necessitated the enforcement of a *hadd* [on her], a *hadd* [is then] enforced on her—however, the *hadd* is reduced by half within the *hudud* that accepts reduction by half....

Question 27: What is the reward for freeing a slave girl?

Allah the exalted said [in the Koran]: “And what can make you know what is [breaking through] the difficult pass [hell]? It is the freeing of a slave.” And [the prophet Muhammad] said: “Whoever frees a believer Allah frees every organ of his body from hellfire.” □

The Elmore Leonard Story

Joan Acocella

Four Novels of the 1980s: City Primeval, LaBrava, Glitz, Freaky Deaky
by Elmore Leonard,
edited by Gregg Sutter.
Library of America, 1,010 pp., \$37.50

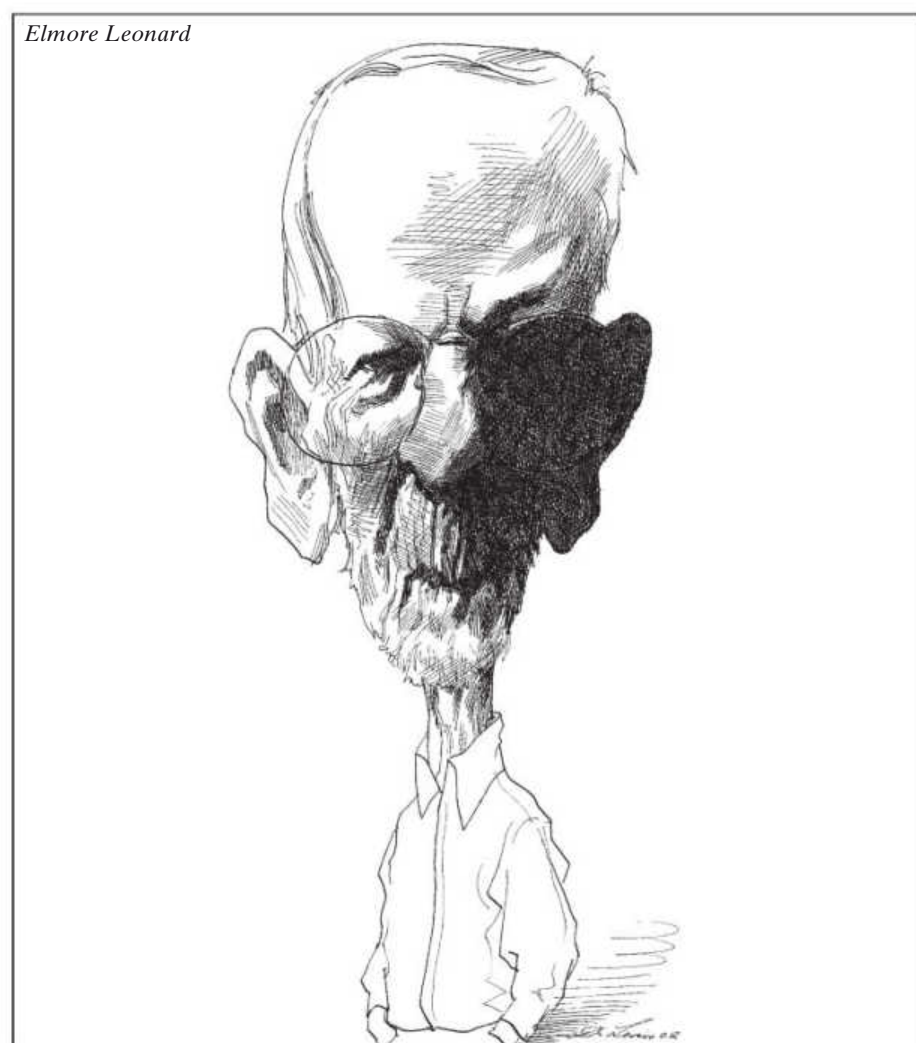
Four Novels of the 1970s: Fifty-Two Pickup, Swag, Unknown Man No. 89, The Switch
by Elmore Leonard,
edited by Gregg Sutter.
Library of America, 809 pp., \$35.00

Charlie Martz and Other Stories: The Unpublished Stories
by Elmore Leonard.
William Morrow, 237 pp., \$31.99

Elmore Leonard, who died two summers ago, aged eighty-seven, became famous as a crime novelist, but he didn't like being grouped with most of the big names in that genre, people such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett or, indeed, any of the noir writers. He disapproved of their melodrama, their pessimism, their psychos and nymphos and fancy writing. He saw in crime no glamour or sexiness but, on the contrary, long hours and sore feet. His criminals didn't become what they were out of any fondness for vice. They just needed work, and that's what was available. They are not serial killers (or only one is), but bank robbers, loan sharks, bookies.

Leonard's father worked for General Motors, and Leonard spent most of his early years in Detroit, his mind occupied mainly by sports and girls. He also liked to read: adventure books and, later, the novels that his sister received from the Book of the Month Club. (Hemingway became his idol.) After graduating from high school in 1943, he was drafted and went with the Seabees to New Guinea and the Admiralty Islands, where, he said, he mostly handed out beers and emptied garbage. Once he got back from the war, he went to the University of Detroit on the GI Bill, majoring in English and philosophy. (His entire education was acquired in Roman Catholic institutions, to which, he later said, he was very grateful, since they taught him to write a proper English sentence.) After graduation, he got a job right away, working for Campbell-Ewald, the ad agency that handled Chevrolet. But he soon came to hate advertising, and he thought he might try writing stories for magazines.

Stories about what? During Leonard's youth, Wild West movies—*My*



Darling Clementine, Red River—were immensely popular, and he adored them. In the 1940s and 1950s, there was also a big market for western novels and, in the magazines, for western stories. Leonard made a schedule for himself. He would get up early, go down to his basement, and, from five to seven, write stories before going to work. The third one he sent out, “Trail of the Apache” (1951), got taken by *Argosy*, a popular men's magazine. In the decade that followed, Leonard sold many more stories, and several novels. A couple of the stories were also made into Hollywood films. Riding high, he quit Campbell-Ewald in 1961, hoping to become a full-time writer. But his family was growing—he and his wife eventually had five children—and he got sidetracked doing freelance jobs to make money.

Meanwhile, his market changed. In the 1960s, westerns were disappearing from both film and print. (The genre was being absorbed by TV.) Leonard's agent, a smart woman named Marguerite Harper, told him to get out of westerns. He tried. After writing his first non-

western novel, *The Big Bounce* (1969), he backslid and wrote two more westerns. He really did love the genre. But then he finally made the break to crime, and he stayed with it for forty-odd years.

Subject matter was only one of Leonard's commercial considerations. More important to him, probably, was his prose style. Not just his western tales, but fully twenty-seven of his novels and stories were adapted for film or television. He said that a big reason his books sold to makers of movies and TV was that, with their natural-seeming dialogue and their open-and-shut scenes, they looked easy to shoot. But Hollywood didn't just discover those virtues in Leonard. He developed them, at least in part, for Hollywood. After Marguerite Harper died, he moved his business to a Hollywood agent, the famous H. N. Swanson, and the Swanson Agency handled most of his work—novels, movies, TV—from then on.

The only time Leonard got jitters about writing, he said, was when, for some reason—a competing assignment, a delay in obtaining information—he couldn't get going on the job. Once he

started, he was fine. He went at it from nine to six, often skipping lunch. (He ate peanuts out of a can.) In fifty-nine years, he produced forty-five novels.

Many people would say that Leonard's greatest gift was his “ear,” meaning, broadly, the ability to write English that, while it sounds extremely natural, is also beautiful and musical. When critics speak of a writer's ear, this often carries a political implication, of the democratic sort. They are talking about writers (Mark Twain, Willa Cather) whose world, by virtue of being humble, would seem to exclude beauty and music, so that when the writer manages to find in it those riches, the world in question—and, by extension, the whole world—comes to seem blessed. In *Glitz* (1985), one of Leonard's first truly distinguished novels, the hero, Vincent Mora, a policeman, is about to go to Puerto Rico on medical leave. He longs to make this trip. He wants to see Roosevelt Roads Naval Station, where his father shipped out in World War II:

He had a picture of his dad... taken at El Yunque, up in the rain forest: the picture of a salty young guy, a coxswain, his white cover one finger over his eyebrows, grinning, nothing but clouds behind him up there on the mountain: a young man Vincent had never known but who looked familiar. He was twenty years older than his dad now.

That's because his father was killed in the Battle of Anzio, in Italy, soon after the photograph was taken.

Leonard doesn't clobber us with this grim fact. Indeed, he tells us about the father's death before describing the photograph. And as Mora's mind turns to the photo, any sorrow is forgotten. It is then that we hear of the “salty young guy,” “grinning, nothing but the clouds behind him.” That last phrase would seem the culmination of happiness. He is in the sky, this lucky boy! Then we come to the next clause—“a young man Vincent had never known”—and we remember. The reason Mora's father is in the sky is that he's dead.

There's another young man. The night before Mora has reason to think about his father, he is coming home from work, walking from his car to his front door, with a bag of groceries—“a half gallon of Gallo Hearty Burgundy, a bottle of prune juice and a jar of Ragù

spaghetti sauce”—when he is accosted by a strung-out young mugger. Somehow he can’t bring himself to drop his jug of Gallo on the sidewalk and reach for his gun, which would have been the safe thing to do, and also the professional thing. Instead he tries to reason with the boy:

He said, “You see that car? Standard Plymouth, nothing on it, not even wheel covers?” It was a pale gray. “You think I’d go out and buy a car like that?” The guy was wired or not paying attention. “It’s a *police* car, asshole. Now gimme the gun and go lean against it.”

The ploy doesn’t work. The boy shoots Mora; the groceries fall; Mora, groping through the broken glass, finds his gun and fires it. He comes out okay; the mugger doesn’t. Mora, the son of a dead boy, has given the world another dead boy.

In twenty years on the police force, this is the first time he has ever killed anyone. He cannot console himself. Lying in his hospital bed, he speaks to his closest friend on the Miami Beach police, Buck Torres:

“I didn’t scare him enough,” Vincent said....

Torres said, “Scare him? That what you suppose to do?”

Vincent said, “You know what I mean. I didn’t handle it right, I let it go too far.”

Torres said, “What are you, a doctor? You want to talk to the asshole? You know how long the line would be, all the assholes out there?

You didn’t kill him somebody else would have to, sooner or later.”

This is a sample of Leonard’s “ear” in the narrow sense of the term: his feel for the spoken word. Asked, once, how he was able to tap into actual speech rhythms, Leonard answered, “I just listen.” (He also tipped his hat to a few novelists he regarded as masters of dialogue, above all George V. Higgins, the author of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*.) In the words he gives his characters, he often dispenses with verb-tense niceties and above all with subordinate conjunctions and the conditional and subjunctive verb forms that go with them. (“You didn’t kill him somebody else would have to.”)

In certain of his novels, these grammatical adjustments, combined with regional usage, produce something one could call dialect. Leonard’s dialogue contains great tributes to the speech of Mexican-Americans and Cuban-Americans and old Jewish men named Maury who want to tell you how much better things were in Miami in the old days. But Leonard lived almost all his life in or around Detroit, a city where, in his time, more than half of the people, and well over half of the people involved in the criminal justice system, were African-American. Consequently, a lot of his best characters are black, and speak a language that many people, black and white, would agree is classic African-American, mid-twentieth-century, northern. Early in his *Unknown Man No. 89* (1977) we encounter a situation commonly found in stories about crimes committed by people working in tandem: not all the

collaborators know what the take was, and some of them suspect that they’re not being given their fair share. In *Unknown Man* one bank robber asks another how much they got from the Wyandotte Savings job:

“We didn’t get nothing,” Bobby said.

Virgil nodded, very slowly. “That’s what I was afraid you were going to say. Nothing from the cashier windows?”

“Nothing,” Bobby said. “No time.”

“I heard seventeen big ones.”

“You heard shit.”

“Told to me by honest gentlemen work for the prosecuting attorney.”

“Told to you by your mama it still shit.”

Virgil then excuses himself to go to the bathroom, emerges with a twelve-gauge shotgun, and blows Bobby away.

Even more masterful than Leonard’s dialogue is his third-person point-of-view narrative, where events are narrated as if objectively but in fact are being related from a tight, though shifting, point of view, filtered. *Freaky Deaky* (1988), which may be the most beloved of Leonard’s novels (it was his own favorite), is dominated by a superb odd couple, Donnell Lewis and Woody Ricks. In the novel’s backstory, in the 1960s and 1970s, Donnell was a Black Panther; Woody was a rich, radical-chic sympathizer. He gave money; he opened his house for parties, as long as he could take one or two of those girls who didn’t

shave their armpits upstairs to bed. Now in the 1980s, all that is over. Woody is a prostrate alcoholic—happy to be one—and Donnell, having managed to get rid of Woody’s chauffeur, cleaning lady, gardener, lawyer, and everyone else, lives with him and sees to his every need, while also trying to figure out a way to become his sole heir, soon.

In the morning, when it’s time to get up, Donnell brings Woody two vodka and ginger ales on a tray. Woody drinks one, vomits, then drinks the other one and starts to feel okay. Breakfast is cornflakes and vodka; lunch seems to be some more vodka. Then nap. Though the nap is described in the third person, Donnell is clearly speaking, or thinking:

What the man liked to do for his nap time, couple of hours before dinner: turn on the stereo way up loud enough to break windows, slide into the pool on his rubber raft naked to Ezio Pinza doing “Some Enchanted Evening” and float around a few minutes before he’d yell, “Donnell?” And Donnell, his hand ready on the button, would shut off the stereo. Like that, Ezio Pinza telling the man to make somebody his own or all through his lifetime he would dream all alone, and then dead silence. No sound at all in the dim swimming pool house, steam hanging over the water, steam rising from the pile of white flesh on the raft, like it was cooking.

Out of Donnell’s combined fastidiousness (“steam rising from the pile

ROBERT MORRIS MOLTINGSEXOSKELETONSSHROUDS



Robert Morris, *Maybe They Won't Find Out*, 2014–2015, linen and resin, 46 x 32 x 72 inches © 2015 Robert Morris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

September 12 - November 14
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of white flesh”), wonderment (“Ezio Pinza telling the man to make somebody his own”), and guile, Leonard creates this marvelous character. In the novel there are also two unsavory former radicals who are planning to extort money from Woody by threatening to blow up his house. And there is a police detective, Mankowski, from the bomb squad. (He’s the hero, at least officially.) The point-of-view mike gets handed around among these people, each supplying his own accents, his own details, scores of them, every one of them perfect for that character, and also perfect just in itself, in its accuracy, its solidity.

In 1981 a fan of Leonard’s, Gregg Sutter, began doing research for him; eventually he went to work for him full-time. Sutter is editing the Library of America’s three-volume set of Leonard’s work. The second volume was just published. Each volume ends with an invaluable twenty-eight-page chronology—almost a biography—and Sutter is at work on a full-scale biography. It is no doubt owing to him that I now know how to open a metal door locked by a deadbolt, where to shoot an alligator (right behind the skull) if I mean to kill it, and how to obtain financing for a movie. Indeed, I believe I could steal a car.

Leonard had a taste for the grotesque, for an almost magical ugliness. Apart from Detroit, his favorite setting was South Florida (he had a condo in North Palm Beach), and that area offered him a lot of vivid material: a drug culture, a flavorful ethnic mix, shirts with hibiscus prints. In one Florida novel, *LaBrava* (1983), a Cuban immigrant named Cundo Rey—car thief by day, go-go dancer by night—tells a man who is trying to eat lunch how he once saw a snake digesting a bat. As he watched this, Cundo says, one of the bat’s wings was still sticking out of the snake’s jaws, and moving. I don’t understand how that’s possible, but I’ll see it till I die: a bat’s wing, or maybe just the tip, feebly moving for a few minutes more, while, as Cundo enthusiastically explains, the other end of the animal is “down in the snake turning to juice.”

In another Florida tale, *Stick* (1983), we are told what it’s like for a drug importer, Chucky, when his daily Quaalude regimen is interrupted: “He felt exactly the way he had felt when he was twelve years old and had killed the dog with his hands.” That sentence is all we hear about the dog until fifty pages later, when we get one more sentence, informing us that after Chucky choked the little thing—it was annoying him—he threw it against a brick wall.

But whatever his fondness for the elaborately horrible, Leonard’s books are sometimes surprisingly short on ordinary violence. Chili Palmer, the loan shark hero of *Get Shorty* (1990)—he is probably Leonard’s most beloved character (he was played by John Travolta in the movie, and that no doubt helped)—doesn’t carry a weapon. Violence is bad for business, he says. When there is violence, even murder, it is often hedged in by so many confusing and ridiculous circumstances that it no longer feels violent. In *Maximum Bob* (1991), a Florida novel, we get the following: “When Roland was shot dead and Elvin sent to prison for killing a man he thought was the one had got the woman to kill Ro-

land, nobody in the family seemed surprised.” By the time you get to the end of that sentence, you’re not surprised either. Makes sense.

This may have less to do with Leonard’s ethics than with his aesthetics. He just wasn’t that interested in his plots, and the reason, he explained, was that he was too interested in his characters, above all the bad guys. In his mind, he said, “I see convicts sitting around talking about a baseball game. I see them as kids. All villains have mothers.” Indeed, he was their mother. He picked out their clothes; he chose their names. (He was a champion namer—this was part of his “ear”: Mr. Woody, Jackie Garbo, Chili Palmer, Cundo Rey. One thug has a tiny little daughter named Farrah.) He gave them girlfriends, ways of speaking, things they liked to eat.



John Travolta, Rene Russo, and Danny DeVito in the film version of Elmore Leonard’s *Get Shorty*

And as they were flowering under the beam of his affection—riding around in their stolen cars, discussing their upcoming felonies—he tended to ignore the noncriminal element in his books: the police, the decent citizens, the people who might push the plot forward by preventing or solving the crimes. Regular people, he complained, “don’t talk with any certain sound.”

The resulting story lines may, in the words of Ben Yagoda of *The New York Times*, come to seem like “smoky improvisations.” Eventually, Yagoda said, “the elements congeal into a taut climax, but for the first two-thirds or so of the book, the characters, the reader and, it turns out, the author simmer on the low burner and, in Huckleberry Finn style, ‘swap juices,’ trying to figure out what’s going on.” This isn’t true of all Leonard’s novels—he created some masterful farce plots—but it’s true of many of them, especially the better ones. Leonard thought writing was fun. (That’s how he could do it from nine to six, five days a week.) And he kept it fun by not forcing himself to do what he didn’t want to do, such as construct tidy plots. It should be added that his plots, however meandering, do not usually make him hard to read. *Glitz*, the book that inspired Yagoda’s remarks, above, spent sixteen weeks on the *Times* best-seller list, and from that point on, every last one of Leonard’s novels was a best seller. He wasn’t the only person having fun.

As for the quality of the writing, his career follows a neat bell curve. This is not usually the case with artists whom we consider first-rate. Very many of them have finished doing their

best work by age sixty. Leonard started doing his best work at age sixty. You can see his earliest efforts in the just-published *Charlie Martz and Other Stories*, a file-cabinet-clean-out collection, with a foreword by Leonard’s son Peter. These are the stories that Leonard pulled out of himself in the basement before going to work at the ad agency in the 1950s, and they are touching, because even though most of them didn’t find publishers, they show you Leonard growing, page by page—getting over the need to be cool, breathing life into the dialogue, giving the characters little tweaks that make them singular, memorable.

The collection covers about ten years. Multiply that by three, and you have something like the first thirty years of Leonard’s novel-writing ca-

reer, consisting of twenty-two books. Some were duds, and he probably knew this, but he kept going. (For one thing, the duds still made money. Crime fiction sells.) Slowly, slowly, he got better, and even slow betterment, if it goes on for thirty years, adds up to serious improvement.

In the early 1980s, something changes. His plots, auspiciously, become messier, and his characters, as if electroshocked, come to full, breathing life. In the eleven years from 1985 to 1996, he produces his five best novels: *Glitz*, with Vincent Mora and the father in the sky; *Freaky Deaky*, with Mr. Woody on the raft; *Get Shorty*, with Chili Palmer; *Maximum Bob*, with Elvin killing the man he thought was the one had got the woman to kill Roland; and *Out of Sight* (1996), whose hero has robbed over two hundred banks. Then, quite smoothly, Leonard passes the apex and begins to decline. Once more, he must have known; once more, this did not stop him.

Most of the critics said nothing, either out of deference to his age or because by then he was not just a writer but a symbol of that cluster of virtues—virility, stoicism, plainspokenness—that are supposedly central to American art, and constitute our bulwark against its takeover by the snobs and the fancy-pants. Such caricatures are routinely drawn of aging artists, partly in defense against anticipated criticisms of their now-weakening product. It is hard for an artist over seventy to get an honest review. Leonard was seventy when *Out of Sight* was published. He wrote thirteen more novels. All of them were overpraised.

But their predecessors weren’t. Part of the reason genre art is held in lower esteem than other art is that it hews to a formula and thereby gives artist and audience less work to do—indeed, less work they *can* do. If, for example, a crime novelist takes on love or hope or the loss of hope, there is a limit to how subtle and fresh his thoughts about such things can be, because if he gets too interesting, he might violate the formula. But in *Out of Sight*, Leonard’s masterpiece, he takes on exactly those three subjects, and gives them a tender new life. Jack Foley, the veteran bank robber, has no interest in changing his line of work. The day after he escapes from prison—the book begins with the jail break—he holds up another bank. “Fell off your horse and got right back on,” his partner, Buddy, says to him.

But in the middle of the escape, something happens to him. Outside the prison yard, he runs into a good-looking twenty-nine-year-old deputy federal marshal, Karen Sisco, carrying a pump-action shotgun. She is there on some other business, but she immediately realizes what Foley is up to and tells him he’s under arrest, whereupon he pushes her into the trunk of her car, climbs in after her, and pulls down the lid. Buddy gets behind the wheel, and off they go.

Foley and Karen spend about ten pages in the trunk together—after the initial awkwardness, they talk about movies (“Another one Faye Dunaway was in I liked, *Three Days of the Condor*”)—and Foley falls in love. So, probably, does Karen, though soon afterward, when they are switching cars, she tries to shoot him. (She takes her job seriously.) Later, as Foley is mooning over her, Buddy tells him he’s too old (forty-seven), and has too long a rap sheet, to think about having a woman like that: “The best either of us can do is look at nice pretty girls and think, well, if we had done it different . . .”

The remaining chapters are devoted to finding out whether that’s true. At points, *Out of Sight* is throbbingly romantic. (Foley and Karen get a single night together, after having drinks in one of those glass-walled revolving cocktail lounges, in a snowstorm.) The book is also, for Leonard, extremely violent. At the same time, strangely, it is one of the author’s funniest books. It ends as we knew it would. Not only does Foley not get the girl; she finally succeeds in arresting him. He asks her to kill him. He can’t bear to go back to prison. She shoots him, but only in the leg, to prevent him from escaping. She then goes up the stairs to where he has fallen and lifts his ski mask:

“I’m sorry, Jack, but I can’t shoot you.”

“You just did, for Christ’s sake.”

“You know what I mean.” She said, “I want you to know . . . I never for a minute felt you were too old for me.” She said, “I’m afraid, though, thirty years from now I’ll feel different about it. I’m sorry, Jack, I really am.”

It’s a cold ending—Hollywood couldn’t bear it; they changed it—but it’s warmly cold. Before this, there was love, and comedy. They’re still there, and so the sadness is greater: *lacrimae rerum*. Not all of Leonard’s books are on this level, but five or six of them are, plus parts of many others. That’s a great deal. □

At the Core of Science

Jim Holt

To Explain the World: The Discovery of Modern Science

by Steven Weinberg.
Harper, 416 pp., \$28.99

In 1967, Steven Weinberg, then a visiting professor at MIT, published what has become one of the most frequently cited papers in physics. In it, he presented a mathematical model that “unified” two of the four fundamental forces of nature. What he showed was that these two seemingly very different forces—the electromagnetic force and the “weak” force, which affects radioactive decay—were actually both manifestations of a single more basic force.

For this achievement in bringing dramatically increased coherence to our understanding of how nature works at its deepest level, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1979 (along with Sheldon Glashow and Abdus Salam, who were also involved in the effort). Weinberg has continued to make profound and innovative contributions to theoretical physics, as the Higgins Professor at Harvard and then as the Josey Regental Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, where he currently teaches. He has an outsized role in setting the agenda for his fellow physicists, many of whom regard him as the most distinguished living member of their profession.

Weinberg has also shown himself to be a superb explainer of science. At a rarefied level, his weighty treatises *The Quantum Theory of Fields* and *Gravitation and Cosmology* are masterworks of theoretical exposition, revered by graduate students. For a popular audience, his 1977 book *The First Three Minutes* gives a cinematically gripping account of what was happening in the infant universe just after the Big Bang. (It was on the last page of this book that he made his oft-quoted observation, “The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.”) And as readers of *The New York Review* have long been aware, Weinberg is an eloquent and persuasive commentator on the philosophical and public policy aspects of science—on the tension between science and religion, on the pros and cons (mainly cons) of a missile defense system, on the abuse of science by certain postmodernists, and on the quest for a “final theory” of physics.

Now Weinberg has added another credential to his crowded vita: historian of science. In his past writings, he had mainly concerned himself with the modern era of physics and astronomy, from the late nineteenth century to the present—a time, he says, when “the goals and standards of physical science have not materially changed.” Yet to appreciate how those goals and standards took shape, he realized he would have to dig deeper into the history of science. So, “as is natural for

an academic,” he volunteered to teach a course on the subject—in this case, to undergraduates with no special background in science or mathematics. Then he immersed himself in the primary and secondary literature. The result is *To Explain the World*, which takes us all the way from the first glimmerings of science in ancient Greece, through the medieval world, both Christian and Islamic, and down to the Newtonian revolution and beyond.

This is hardly the first such attempt to canvass the history of science. Yet Weinberg’s book is distinctive in several ways. To begin with, it is avowedly,

modern science (each tried to prescribe rules for doing science, which “never works”). He deems “quite inadequate” the belated apology that Pope John Paul II offered in 1979 for the persecution of Galileo. It was not enough, he argues, for the pope to acknowledge that Galileo had been correct in holding that the earth moves; even had he been mistaken, the church had no business imprisoning him and suppressing his works.

Weinberg enlivens his historical narrative with quick autobiographical asides. When, for instance, he describes how the great Arab astronomer al-Biruni was on occasion guilty

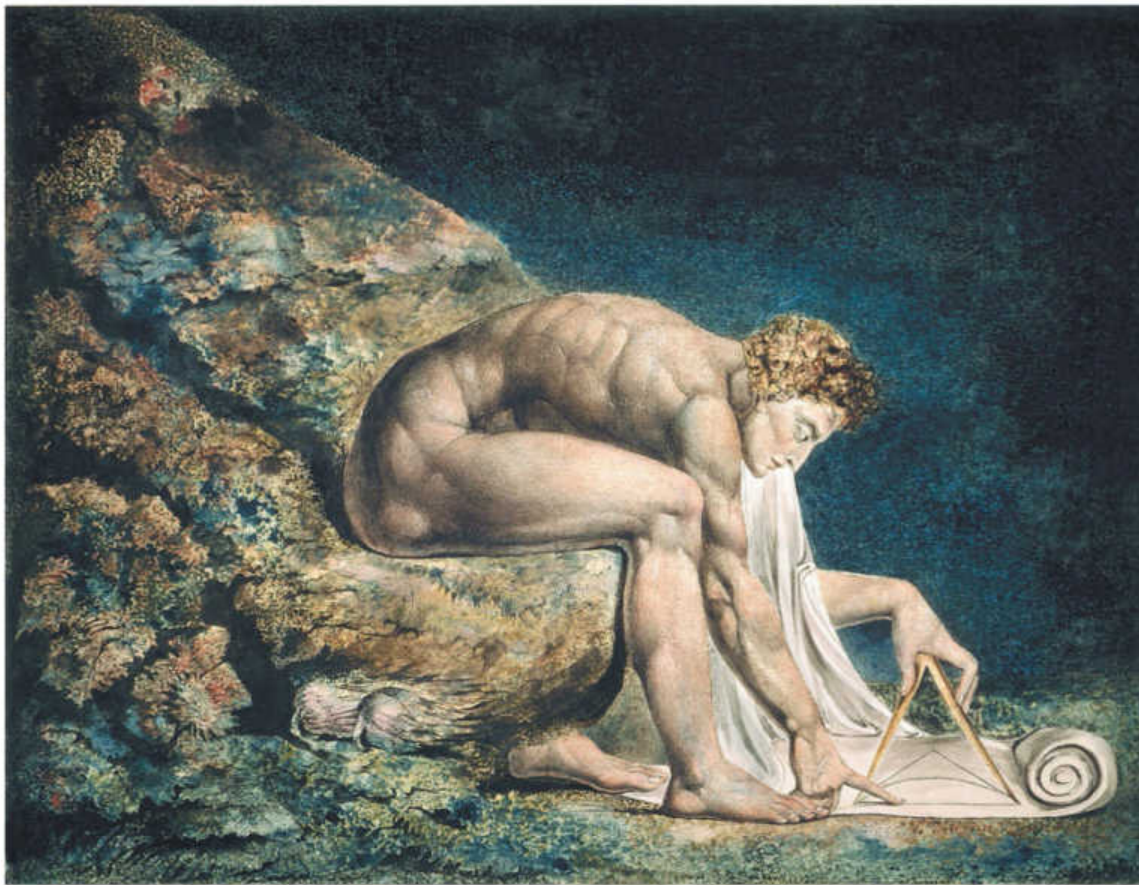
unified terrestrial and celestial dynamics—arose from the earlier advances of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, and Galileo. (The obvious pleasure Weinberg takes in reconstructing the thought processes of these figures reminded me of his fellow Nobel laureate Richard Feynman, who used to entertain undergraduates at Caltech with his own ingenious reconstructions of Newton’s reasoning.) Weinberg is renowned among his fellow physicists as a virtuoso calculator, and that knack pays dividends here. “I have even taken some pleasure in uncovering a few errors made by scientific heroes that I have not seen mentioned by historians,” he notes.

One way of characterizing the early history of science is to say that it got off to a good start, then faltered. The good start, supposedly, was the doctrine of atomism—the idea that reality, at its most basic level, consisted of tiny indivisible particles moving about in otherwise empty space. Atomism was propounded by the pre-Socratic philosophers Leucippus and Democritus. It is entirely naturalistic, accounting for how the world works by means of impersonal processes, not the volitions of deities. From a modern perspective, atoms-in-void might sound like a very good hypothesis. (Richard Feynman, indeed, held that no other simple hypothesis has been more fruitful in explaining the world.) But Weinberg is not impressed with Democritus and the other pre-Socratics, at least as proto-scientists. Judging from the surviving

fragments of their writings, they never attempted to justify their speculations, or to test them against evidence. “Their theories had no bite,” he says, amounting more to poetry than to science.

As for the early faltering in the history of science, that is generally blamed on Plato and Aristotle: Plato, for suggesting that scientific truth could be attained by reason alone, in blithe disregard of empirical observation; Aristotle, for trying to explain nature teleologically, in terms of ends and purposes. Weinberg concurs with this critique. Plato’s ideal of attaining knowledge of the world by the unaided intellect, he says, was “a false goal inspired by mathematics,” one that for centuries “stood in the way of progress that could be based only on careful analysis of careful observation.” And it “never was fruitful” to ask, as Aristotle did, “what is the purpose of this or that physical phenomenon.” Still, Weinberg reminds us, some charity is in order here: “Nothing about the practice of modern science is obvious to someone who has never seen it done.”

One field of science where the Greek and Hellenistic world did make progress was astronomy. The impetus was partly practical: the sky had long served as a compass, clock, and calendar. Also, the regularity of heavenly



William Blake: Newton, 1795–circa 1805

even defiantly, “Whiggish”: it judges the science of the past by the standards of the present. (The use of “Whiggish” in this sense goes back to the historian Herbert Butterfield, who referred to the tendency to see our forebears as groping their way toward our present, presumably enlightened institutions as “the Whig interpretation of history.”) Weinberg is forthright in telling us what the Greeks and medievals got wrong—not just in their particular misreckonings, but in their entire attitude toward inquiry into nature.

He brooks no nonsense about “incommensurability”: the idea, say, that Aristotelian science cannot be deemed inferior to its Newtonian successor, since each must be assessed according to its own internal concepts and values. The core goal of science, he maintains, has always been the same: “to explain the world.” And only since Newton, he is prepared to argue, have we been doing it more or less right.

The author’s voice also adds a distinctive note. Weinberg is bracingly opinionated; he decries the “persistent intellectual snobbery” that Plato and Aristotle showed in their disdain for science’s practical applications, and he explains just why he thinks Francis Bacon and Descartes are the “most overrated” among the progenitors of

of “misplaced precision”—that is, of calculating results to more decimal places than the quality of the data warranted—Weinberg confesses how “I once got into trouble in this way” during a summer job calculating the trajectories of atoms. Subtle parallels are drawn between past and present science. Take what physicists disparagingly call “fine-tuning”: adjusting a scientific theory to make certain quantities equal, without any understanding of why they should be equal. Such fine-tuning vitiated the celestial models of Plato’s followers, in which different spheres carrying the planets and stars were assumed, with no good reason, to rotate in exact unison. But as Weinberg observes, a fine-tuning problem also dogs current efforts to make sense of the “dark energy” that is speeding up the expansion of the universe. “The appearance of fine-tuning in a scientific theory is like a cry of distress from nature, complaining that something needs to be better explained,” he writes.

What makes his book rewarding, above all, is the sheer felicity of Weinberg’s explanations. The easy authority of a master physicist is apparent on every page. I have never come across a more insightful account of how the Newtonian synthesis—the laws of motion and of universal gravity, which

movements made them simpler to describe than earthly phenomena. But not too simple. Although the sun, the moon, and the “fixed stars” looked regular enough in their circuits through the sky, the “wandering stars”—that is, the planets—were perplexing: they seemed to move at varying speed, and even to reverse direction.

“Much of the story of the emergence of modern science deals with the effort, extending over two millennia, to explain the peculiar motions of the planets,” Weinberg writes. This effort began with what Weinberg calls “Plato’s homework problem”: find a scheme that makes sense of the apparently irregular wanderings of the planets on the assumption that all heavenly motion is in reality both circular and of uniform speed.

Why circular? Because the circle is the most perfect and symmetrical form; therefore circular motion, at a stately uniform speed, was most fitting for celestial bodies. So Plato held. And Aristotle agreed. In the Aristotelian cosmos, everything has a “natural” tendency to motion that fulfills its inner potential. For the sublunary part of the cosmos (the region below the moon), that natural tendency is to move in a straight line: downward for earthen things (like rocks) and water; upward for air and fiery things (like sparks). In the heavenly realm, though, things are composed not of earth, water, air, or fire, but of a fifth element, “quintessence,” which is perfect and eternal. And its natural motion is uniformly circular. The stars, the sun, the moon, and the planets are carried in their orbits by a complicated arrangement of crystalline spheres, all centered around an immobile earth.

The Platonic/Aristotelian conviction that celestial motions must be circular was a stubbornly persistent one. It was basic to Ptolemy’s system, which improved on Aristotle’s in conforming to the astronomical data by allowing the planets to move in combinations of circles called “epicycles.” (An epicycle is the looping curve made by a point on a little wheel that is attached to the rim of a bigger wheel as both wheels turn.)

And it even survived the Copernican revolution. Copernicus, indeed, was something of a conservative in his Platonic reverence for the circle as the heavenly pattern. His motives for dethroning the earth in favor of the sun as the immobile hub of the cosmos were largely aesthetic. He objected to the fact that Ptolemy, though faithful to Plato’s requirement that heavenly motion be circular, had departed from Plato’s other requirement that it be of uniform speed. By putting the sun at the center (actually, somewhat off-center), Copernicus aspired to honor circularity while restoring uniformity. But to make his system fit the observations as well as Ptolemy’s—to “save the appearances”—Copernicus had to introduce still more epicycles. That, of course, was a mistake. And as Weinberg notes, it illustrates a recurrent theme in the history of science: “A simple and beautiful theory that agrees pretty well with observation is often closer to the truth than a complicated ugly theory that agrees better with observation.”

The problem for the systems of Aristotle, Ptolemy, and Copernicus alike is that the planets do not move in perfect circles. They move in ellipses—like cir-

cles that have been stretched a certain amount along one axis. It was Kepler, about a century after Copernicus, who finally, and reluctantly (for he too had Platonic affinities), realized this. Thanks to his examination of the meticulous observations compiled by the astronomer Tycho Brahe, Kepler “was the first to understand the nature of the departures from uniform circular motion that had puzzled astronomers since the time of Plato.”

The substitution of (supposedly ugly) ellipses for circles unseated Plato’s notion of perfection as the celestial explanatory principle. It also destroyed Aristotle’s model of the planets borne in their orbits by crystalline spheres (described poetically in Dante’s *Paradiso*). For as Weinberg observes, “there is no solid body whose rotation can produce an ellipse.” A moment’s reflection confirms this: even if a planet were attached to an ellipsoid crystal, the rotation of that crystal would still trace out a circle. Evidently, the planets were pursuing their elliptical motion through empty space. What could be holding them in their orbits?

Here science had reached the threshold of explaining the world not geometrically, according to shape, but dynamically, according to force. And it was Newton—an “odd bird,” Weinberg concedes—who finally crossed that threshold. He was the first to formulate, in his famous “laws of motion,” the concept of force. He proved that Kepler’s ellipses were the very orbits that the planets would take if they were attracted toward the sun by a force that decreased as the square of the planet’s distance from the sun (the same way that brightness decreases with distance). And by comparing the motion of the moon in its orbit around the earth to that of, say, an apple as it falls to the ground, he deduced that the forces governing them were quantitatively the same. “This,” Weinberg observes, “was the climactic step in the unification of the celestial and terrestrial in science.”

Weinberg’s account of how Newton arrived at his principle of universal gravitation (and invented calculus along the way) is wonderfully lucid. It includes details and subtleties that will be new even to those well acquainted with the broad story. His verdict on the nature of Newton’s achievement is unequivocal. Unlike some historians of science, who have stressed Newton’s roots in medieval thought (John Maynard Keynes called Newton “the last of the magicians”), Weinberg sees him as marking a genuine discontinuity. Set against what Newton accomplished, “all past successes of physical theory were parochial.” By coming up with a unified explanation of the behavior of planets, comets, moons, tides, and apples, Newton “provided an irresistible model for what a physical theory should be”—a model that fit no preexisting metaphysical criterion.

The very sense of what constituted a scientific explanation began to shift. In contrast to Aristotle, who purported to explain the falling of a rock by appeal to its inner striving, Newton was unconcerned with finding a deeper cause for gravity. “I do not ‘feign’ hypotheses,” he famously declared in the *Principia*. What mattered were his mathematically stated principles describing this force, and their striking ability to ac-

count in a unified way for a vast range of phenomena.

Newton’s contemporaries on the Continent, especially followers of Descartes and Leibniz, objected to an unexplained force that somehow could reach across millions of miles of empty space. It struck them as an occult element. In demanding a deeper explanation for gravity, these philosophers were hanging on to the Greek ideal that scientific theories must have an ultimate foundation in reason. “We have learned to give this up,” Weinberg writes.

Of course, a deeper explanation was subsequently found for Newton’s law of gravitation. A hundred years ago, Einstein showed that gravity could be explained as a manifestation of the curvature in spacetime resulting from the presence of matter and energy. In a sense, Einstein banished Newton’s “force” in favor of geometry. That might sound like a reversion to the Greek point of view. But Weinberg is adamant that the difference between Einstein’s and Newton’s theories not be exaggerated:

The general theory of relativity is very much in the style of Newton’s theories of motion and gravitation: it is based on general principles that can be expressed as mathematical equations, from which consequences can be mathematically deduced for a broad range of phenomena, which when compared with observation allow the theory to be verified.

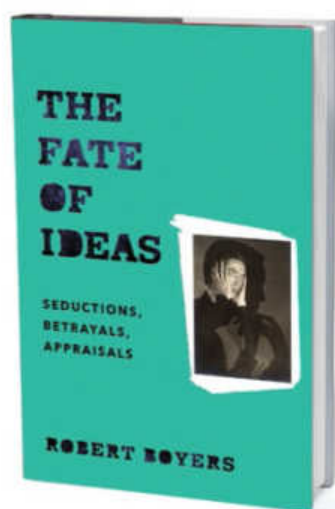
Einstein did not overthrow Newton; he subsumed him. General relativity explains why Newton’s equations work well in a limited range. And that is why today we teach students to solve problems using Newtonian physics, but not Aristotelian physics.

The moral Weinberg draws is that successful theories like Newton’s may work for reasons their creators do not understand—reasons that deeper theories will later reveal. These deeper theories may bring with them a strikingly different vision of reality. In general relativity, for example, Newton’s ideas of absolute space and time are rejected, and the question of whether the earth revolves around the sun or vice versa ceases to be meaningful. But though the conceptual trappings have radically changed more than once since Newton, the hard mathematical core advances in a cumulative way. Scientific progress is not a matter of building theories on a foundation of reason, but of unifying a greater range of phenomena under simpler and more general principles. That is what distinguishes explanation from mere description.

Near the end of *To Explain the World*, Weinberg writes of the joy—always a “flawed” joy—that accompanies such a gain in unity. He quotes Ptolemy’s expression of delight upon making a clarifying breakthrough in accounting for celestial patterns: “When I search out the massed wheeling circles of the stars, my feet no longer touch the Earth, but, side by side with Zeus himself, I take my fill of ambrosia, the food of the gods.” I’m guessing Weinberg must have felt something similar when he himself discovered how to unify two of the four fundamental forces of nature—although I’m sure he’d describe the feeling in a more secular and ironic way. □

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The Perils of Painting Now

Jed Perl

The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World

an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, December 14, 2014–April 5, 2015. Catalog of the exhibition by Laura Hoptman. Museum of Modern Art, 184 pp., \$50.00

Like the reports of the end of history that we have been hearing, the many reports of the death of painting have no basis in reality. Painting flourishes—in the studios of artists, in galleries in New York’s Chelsea, Lower East Side, Williamsburg, and Bushwick, as well as in galleries around the world. Museums, whatever their ever-deepening engagement with installation and performance art and the cavernous spaces designed to accommodate such work, are hardly neglecting contemporary painting.

Since last summer, the Museum of Modern Art has presented a vast Sigmar Polke retrospective as well as “The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World.” A continuing fascination with painting fueled “In the Studio,” a historical survey of paintings of artists’ workplaces, mounted at the Gagosian Gallery on West 21st Street over the winter. And this summer the New Museum—a New York institution that prides itself on its innovative programming—has organized a retrospective of the contemporary German painter Albert Oehlen. Although it sometimes seems that anything but painting is what arts professionals are most eager to put before the public, the truth is that when artists, critics, and curators want to take the pulse of contemporary art, painting inspires much of the deepest, most heartfelt, and heated discussion.

David Salle—a painter who came to prominence a generation ago, at another moment when painting was said by many to be dead—recently wrote that “the Web’s frenetic sprawl is opposite to the type of focus required to make a painting, or, for that matter, to look at one.” I think he’s right. And for this very reason painting becomes a steadying force—a source of stability in an art world where everything can seem to be up for grabs. With performances, moving images, live and recorded music and sounds, as well as just about anything that can be pulled off the Internet appearing in the galleries, it is more difficult than ever before to grapple with the fundamental questions of style and meaning that are integral to art. The essentially plain-spoken, artisanal nature of painting, which can’t avoid registering all the pressures of the world around us, albeit sometimes by simply setting them aside, can help visitors to galleries and museums understand what is happening in art today.

It may well be this sense of painting’s clarifying power that motivated the Museum of Modern Art to mount “The Forever Now,” the first exhibition in the museum in at least thirty years that offered an expansive survey of contemporary painting. Laura Hoptman, who



Richard Diebenkorn: Studio Wall, 1963

organized “The Forever Now,” says as much in her introduction to the exhibition catalog. “The obsession with recuperating aspects of the past is the condition of culture in our time,” she declares, “yet it appears in contemporary art at this moment most clearly in the field of painting.” Although Hoptman and I do not agree when it comes to how to evaluate contemporary painting—we are interested in very different artists—I can see that we are reacting to the same seismic shifts.

For hundreds of years—probably since the Renaissance—a painter’s style has implied a certain set of values, with Classicism, Romanticism, Naturalism, Cubism, and Expressionism each reflecting a generally agreed-upon worldview. In today’s anything-goes art world a particular pictorial style no longer implies a particular worldview or set of values. Style has been dissociated from substance, so that while for one artist classicism still represents the timeless order it did for Poussin, for another artist classicism is a camp joke about the banality of history, and for yet another its muffled emotions suggest robotic, posthuman anomie. It is no longer enough for an artist to begin by embracing a style. Now an artist who believes in the inextricable link between style and substance has to almost single-handedly reconstruct the substance of that style.

But there is another approach, popular today and embraced by Hoptman. An artist can forget about substance and celebrate style for its own sake, which seems to me to be the case with most of the painters in “The Forever Now.” Among them are Charline von Heyl, Laura Owens, Josh Smith, Mary

Weatherford, and Michael Williams. Hoptman, who has brought these artists together along with a dozen others, believes that “the immediate and hugely expanded catalogue of visual information offered by the Internet has radically altered visual artists’ relationship to the history of art.” Style—and the substance it once implied—has become a take-it-or-leave-it proposition. And this phenomenon—which she dubs “atemporality,” a term borrowed from the science-fiction writer William Gibson—has created, she writes enthusiastically, “a *connoisseurship* of boundless information, a picking and choosing of elements of the past to resolve a problem or a task at hand.” In my view, the process Hoptman describes—I would characterize it as closer to scavenging than connoisseurship—has had a debilitating effect on both the artist’s and the audience’s relationship with questions of style.

Confusion reigns. Let me give an example. Recently, the Gladstone Gallery presented an exhibition of rather accomplished paintings by Victor Man, a Romanian artist who was born in 1974 and has shown a good deal in Europe. Each of Man’s small, dark, realist figure paintings includes a highly disturbing twist, such as a face with a third eye or a woman’s head in the lap of a woman whose own head we don’t see. The canvases suggest the dour sobriety of works by half-forgotten Neo-Romantics of the 1930s and 1940s, especially Pavel Tchelitchew and Eugene Berman. I was interested in Man’s paintings—and befuddled by them as well. I had no way of knowing if he meant me to take his capable, prosaic realism at face value, with the absurdist or Surrealist elements sug-

gesting impending nightmares, or if the violations of realistic logic were meant to mock realism itself. Style offered no guide to substance. I left the gallery bemused.

I am not the only one who is bemused by a lot of contemporary painting. Among the most widely read essays and reviews that have dealt with painting in the past few years there are more than a few that at least begin in a state of bewilderment. The critic Raphael Rubenstein, in his much-discussed essay “Provisional Painting,” writes about a group of abstract painters—they include Raoul De Keyser, Mary Heilmann, Albert Oehlen, and Christopher Wool—who “all deliberately turn away from ‘strong’ painting for something that seems to constantly risk incoherence or collapse.”* Rubenstein wonders: “Why would an artist demur at the prospect of a finished work, court self-sabotaging strategies, sign his or her name to a painting that looks, from some perspectives, like an utter failure?” The styles of the works to which Rubenstein refers have become enigmas, even to those in the know. An assortment of clever terms—almost sobriquets—have been devised to describe the anti-styles and un-styles in painting, among them Crapstraction and Zombie Formalism.

Sometimes it seems that the only way painters have of adequately conveying their sense of crisis is by attacking the basic elements of previous works of art, doing away with paint, canvas, and a stable support. A few years ago, the Luxembourg & Dayan gallery hosted a show of “Unpainted Paintings,” featuring works made using Kool-Aid, urine, fire, and silver foil, on supports that included a piece of shag rug. Massimiliano Gionio, the New Museum curator who organized the retrospective of Albert Oehlen’s work, which is a mash-up of glib pop culture references and scabrous abstract brushwork, writes that the artist’s goal is “to paint while at the same time denouncing the inadequacy of painting.” Painting remains the primal artistic act, which certain artists apparently seek to violate and even annihilate. Oehlen’s canvases, with their silk-screened digital images and scraps and scrawls of paint, manage to be simultaneously brash and bland. Oehlen, Gionio observes, “paints against painting—he paints to kill painting.” But painting will survive.

Looking at the work of the seventeen contemporary painters Hoptman gathered together in “The Forever Now,” my feeling was that style was mostly designed to function as a bulwark, screen, or curtain. The show opened with works by Joe Bradley that could only in the most tenuous way be referred to as paintings. Each consists of a minimal sign—a rudimentary cross; the number twenty-three; a stick figure—inscribed in grease pencil on bare canvas.

While Bradley certainly presents an extreme case of visual emptiness, even the painterly pleasures offered

**Art in America*, May 2009.

at “The Forever Now” suggested not so much sensuous openness as narcissistic resistance. The thickly worked compositions of Mark Grotjahn, with their elaborately tangled and riotously colored skeins, swags, and drapes of paint, evoke grandiose rope tricks or an Arabian Nights caravan. Although Grotjahn knows how to engage the eye, the engagement is somehow sterile, a visual game or puzzle without any discernible emotional texture. Are Grotjahn’s pictures gladdening or saddening? I cannot say.

In her catalog essay, Hoptman summons that most fashionable of images—the zombie. “The undead,” she writes, apparently in dead earnest, “are the perfect embodiments of the atemporal.” And she goes on to argue that

the metaphor of the zombie—a resurrected body without a soul that feeds on other bodies—is useful: it evokes the voracious hunger for ideas and images from the past that, in some paintings today, are consumed, digested, and re-presented in guises that resemble their original forms, but are somehow changed.

But most of the artists in “The Forever Now” have a sense of history that goes back no more than a couple of generations—which is a split second in the history of art. Painters such as Matt Connors, Charline von Heyl, Julie Mehretu, Josh Smith, and Michael Williams seem mostly aware of Abstract Expressionism and the various developments, from Pop to Minimalism, that arrived in its wake. For them, tradition is puddle deep.

Hoptman may feel that in presenting what she calls “the zombie paradigm”—and she admits it can be seen as a “pejorative”—she is making a case for a changed understanding of the role of the artist, much as Oscar Wilde did when he troubled late Victorian audiences by comparing works of art to masks. Wilde’s idea was that the stylizations of the mask revealed a truth that was dissembled by life’s quotidian confusions. For Hoptman, truth is itself a kind of confusion, which artists reflect through their willful eclecticism. Closing her essay, she writes of artists who are “in search of a broader, bolder notion of culture.” The paintings she brings together, to the extent that they are not merely bland (which many of them are), function as mirrors of contemporary turmoil; personal style tends to reflect many of the styles chronicled on the Internet. What is lacking is pictorial style as a guide to private feelings, private emotions. And that is a great loss—the greatest loss of all.

Hoptman’s fascination with atemporality put “The Forever Now” on a collision course with painting itself, which is nothing if it is not timebound, the workings of the artist’s hand at a particular moment, attesting to the authenticity of the artist’s experience. In painting, the autograph of the artist—the sense of the surface as constructed piece by piece—is an assurance of authenticity. Of course authenticity can also become a trap, an oppressive expression of the narcissistic personality. This is an idea that was argued

quite forcefully by Lionel Trilling in a fascinating series of speculations, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, presented as the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1970 and published in book form in 1972. I had never read *Sincerity and Authenticity*—the title suggested a critic who was resolutely burying his head in the sand at a time when camp and kitsch were already entrenched—but after the stylistic free-for-all of “The Forever Now,” Trilling’s ideas seem to have a contemporary point.

Most substantial conversations about painting today—they often appear online, in magazines such as *artcritical*,

Trilling’s argument was grounded in the strong opposition he saw between the nature of sincerity and the nature of authenticity. Sincerity, according to Trilling, is essentially social, “the necessity of expressing and guaranteeing” oneself to the public. Authenticity is a very different matter, an obsession with individual experience that Trilling believes has in modern times come more and more to overwhelm sincerity. Sincerity involves a “rhetoric of avowal”—a balancing, somehow, of “the troubled ambiguity of the personal life” and “the unshadowed manifestness of the public life.” In this sense sincerity has much in

What was being lost was the dynamic relationship between sincerity and authenticity that had given the work of an artist such as Cézanne its slow-building power. For Cézanne, the sincerity of his commitment to traditional stylistic legibility was constantly challenged by the authenticity of his idiosyncratic experience of nature. It is Cézanne’s double allegiance—to the sincerity of tradition and the authenticity of his own perceptions of form—that has made his work central for artists from Matisse, Picasso, and Braque down to our own day.

We cannot even begin to determine the authenticity of a painting until we have some sense of the artist’s character—of the quality of the artist’s sincerity. This brings me back to how utterly confounding I found Joe Bradley’s glib graffiti in the “Forever Now” exhibition. Bradley’s style—if we can call it that—is so stripped down that it offers no way to even begin to judge what Trilling called “attitude and posture.” But it is not easy to judge the sincerity or authenticity of a work of art even when one is given more stylistic evidence. This is because in the arts what Trilling referred to as “peremptory and absolute laws” are never entirely peremptory or entirely absolute, at least not when they have any expressive value.

Some have argued for a return to traditional skills in painting and drawing, to what Robert Hughes once called “the nuts and bolts of the profession.” While there is much to be said for the skills on which Hughes insisted—for what Trilling might have called a legible rhetoric—we are all also perfectly aware that neither proficiency nor virtuosity is in and of itself a guarantee of either sincerity or authenticity. We know this from the history of art. Anthony Van Dyck, who was every bit as much a virtuoso as Rubens, can nonetheless strike us as glib and insincere in his mastery, something we hardly ever feel with Rubens. The awkwardness of the figure drawing in many of Claude Lorrain’s landscapes and in some of Poussin’s later pastorals may by some standards be judged a failure of proficiency, and yet the artists marshal their weaknesses (if that’s what they are) as a guarantee of both authenticity and sincerity.

To the extent that virtuosity can be seen as reflecting a respect for exacting standards, it is a form of sincerity. Certainly, this is how it was often interpreted during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. And yet virtuosity can also be a form of obfuscation, insincerity, or inauthenticity. Just think of the virtuosity of John Currin, the most tongue-in-cheek of contemporary figure painters. Currin’s nudes, with breasts and thighs so smooth and shiny as to suggest porcelain dolls, are a parody of erotic delight. His confectionary pink flesh and glittering highlights have a conventional “finish” that feels glib and perfunctory. With Currin, virtuosity is a sly gambit, not a hard-won accomplishment. Sincerity and authenticity must be communicated through a pictorial struggle, through the ways that stylistic traditions and qualities of line, color, and composition are embodied, enriched, and transformed. That’s missing in Currin.



Brett Baker: Night Table, 2013–2015

Hyperallergic, and *Painters’ Table*, and on Raphael Rubinstein’s blog *The Silo*—cannot avoid the question of authenticity, whether explicitly or implicitly. As for sincerity, the other pillar of Trilling’s discussion, however alien it may be to contemporary sensibilities, he persuades me that it is, in the complex sense he means it, precisely what is missing in a lot of contemporary painting. Reading *Sincerity and Authenticity* now, more than forty years after it appeared, I realize that far from blindly upholding values already imperiled when he was writing, Trilling was writing out of an awareness that the time had come to decide what might still be worth saving. While *Sincerity and Authenticity* is far from a complete success—Trilling goes off on too many tangents, his wide-ranging ideas sometimes drawing attention away from the arguments they are meant to advance—the book is a bold provocation.

common with pictorial style, which at least traditionally can be seen as reconciling the artist’s inner experience with the public world. Artistic style is a public avowal.

In the 1970s, Trilling wanted to warn against the excesses of authenticity and reaffirm the importance of sincerity. He sees authenticity as emphasizing the individual’s insistence on being true to “the troubled ambiguity of the personal life”—social norms can be challenged or put aside. He argues that the modern idea of authenticity grew out of an awareness of “how ruthless an act was required to assert autonomy in a culture schooled in duty and in obedience to peremptory and absolute law.” But he fears that the dialectical pressure between sincerity and authenticity that originally gave modernism so much of its vitality was collapsing by the 1960s, replaced with an unfettered worship of authenticity, which could lead only to anarchy.

Adam Reich/Elizabeth Harris Gallery, New York City

One younger painter I think is really grappling with these difficult questions is Brett Baker. He was born in 1973 and has been showing his abstract canvases at the Elizabeth Harris Gallery in recent years. I have seen these small, heavily impastoed pictorial inventions a couple of times, with deepening interest and admiration. Their tight-packed, elongated rectangular forms—which are invariably based on a rather simple grid—bring to mind some of the layered compositions of Paul Klee as well as some of the textiles of Anni Albers. Working with orchestrations of jewel-rich blues, purples, and reds or forest-deep greens, oranges, and browns, Baker builds images that are simultaneously luxuriant and austere; the thickness of the paint is set in a tension with the limited nature of his structures. The vertically and diagonally aligned strokes of paint suggest geological layerings. The paintings have a Limoges-enamel intimacy.

I report my impressions of Baker's paintings in a speculative spirit. He sets his work securely within a tradition of geometric abstraction, and he embraces that tradition with a virtuosity that leaves us at the very least with a sense of his deep and considered commitment—with a sense of his sincerity. He carries off his chosen style with considerable panache. As for the more complex question of meaning, of emotion—of the work's truth to something within—I feel it remains an open question. My second encounter with Baker's work in a couple of years suggests that its style, however limited, registers an emotional amplitude through the growing confidence of his stained-glass

color, with its plangent, mysterious tonalities.

Much of the trouble in the visual arts today comes from our increasing dependence on the Internet, where all the richness and complexity of an artist's painterly surfaces is reduced to pixels. Paintings are flattened out by the Internet. And the paintings that "take" to digital reproduction almost invariably trump the ones that demand the direct response of a human eye. The Internet, with its clicks and links, threatens to deny us the gradual, evolving, unmediated acquaintance with an artist's actual work that I've had with Baker's. In order to understand an artist's work, we need repeated opportunities to see how qualities of surface and texture—what might be called facture—do and do not reflect deeper impulses.

No recent exhibition in New York has represented more of an effort to reestablish some contact with the bedrock of painting than the extraordinarily ambitious "In the Studio: Paintings," mounted for the Gagosian Gallery on West 21st Street by John Elderfield, formerly chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art. A parallel show, "In the Studio: Photographs," was at Gagosian on Madison Avenue, curated by Peter Galassi. In Chelsea, Elderfield brought together works from the sixteenth century to nearly the present, and in his catalog essay he also discussed the studio paintings of Velázquez, Vermeer, and Courbet. Elderfield emphasized the etymological relationship between the stu-

dio and the idea of study, the studio as a place where artisanal and intellectual impulses are united. He underscored this idea with a powerful quotation from Delacroix, who envisioned the studio as a place where "nature" would be reimagined by "human genius at the apogee of its development."

"In the Studio," while too diffuse to be an altogether successful experience, tapped into the longing that so many people now feel for painting's primal power. In the Western tradition—where at least since the end of the Renaissance painting has been the essential visual art—the studio has become the place where questions of artistic sincerity and authenticity and their relationship are resolved. Even Massimiliano Gioni, the New Museum curator whom nobody would accuse of being unwelcoming to new media, finds himself commenting in the catalog for the Albert Oehlen exhibition that

it is ironic—if not downright depressing or, perhaps, sadly illuminating—that one of the best descriptions of what life in the digital era feels like had to be captured in the old medium of painting rather than in some new, hyper-technological invention.

What I believe Gioni—and Laura Hoptman—are unable or perhaps embarrassed to see is the source of painting's enduring strength. Painting, with its many intertwined conventions, provides models of sincerity through which individual painters can communicate their particular experiences, attitudes, ideas, and ideals.

Among the most striking works Elderfield included in "In the Studio" was Richard Diebenkorn's *Studio Wall* (1963; see illustration on page 55). For me this dark-toned canvas evokes the coffee-and-cigarette melancholy of fog-bound afternoons in Berkeley, California, where Diebenkorn painted some of his finest canvases in the years around 1960. Diebenkorn gives us a very austere view of the studio, with a humble folding chair and behind it the studio wall, on which a selection of the artist's drawings has been hung, at least three of them figure studies. Among the objects leaning against the wall are probably a couple of canvases. This is a painting about the processes of the studio: the drawings that may or may not lead to paintings; the paintings that are unfinished or finished or abandoned; the chair on which to sit and draw or sit and reflect on the act of painting.

It is a wonderfully grave composition. The modest austerity with which Diebenkorn renders the various elements in his studio assures the authenticity of the artist's experience, even as the subtle elegance of the composition guarantees the sincerity with which he addresses his audience. It's no wonder that Diebenkorn, who died in 1993, is a painter for whom so many contemporary artists have especially warm feelings. He recognizes the perilous state of painting. He makes a painting that unmakes and then remakes painting's traditions. While those traditions are very much under attack today, the challenges coming from so many different quarters only serve to reaffirm painting's extraordinary vitality. □



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The Shadows Know

Phillip Lopate

**Bitter Bronx:
Thirteen Stories**
by Jerome Charyn.
Liveright, 223 pp., \$24.95

In his long, exceptionally prolific career, encompassing over fifty titles in fifty years, Jerome Charyn has attracted the warm respect of critics and fellow writers, if not a mass public following. Walking a tightrope between high literary sophistication and pop culture (his first two loves were comic books and movies), he has managed to elicit comparisons to all the B's: Bellow, Babel, Borges, and Balzac. His debut novel, *Once Upon a Droschky* (1964), a comic romp involving Yiddish stage veterans on Second Avenue, was followed by works exhibiting remarkable range in almost every genre: crime novels featuring his memorable police inspector Isaac Sidel, film criticism, memoirs, urban meditations, travel, a lively romance set in Stalinist Russia (*The Green Lantern*), biographical studies (Joe DiMaggio, Isaac Babel, Marilyn Monroe), graphic novels, and historical fiction (including, most recently, first-person novels in the voices of Abraham Lincoln and Emily Dickinson). For all that restless shape-shifting, there are certain constants in Charyn's work: an energetic, urbane prose, a playful approach to narrative, a fascination with history, and a downbeat, noirish perspective. This fatalistic outlook coexists comfortably with the ebullient verve and propulsion of his prose.

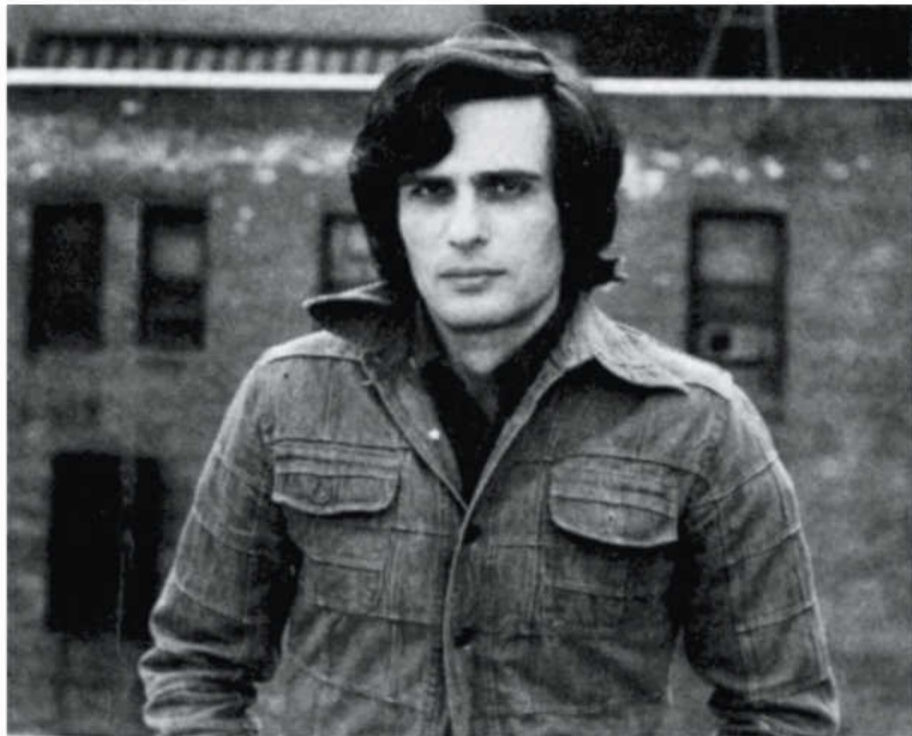
The Bronx, where the author grew up, has been a recurrent, almost a talismanic object of scrutiny for him. The exodus from the outer boroughs to Manhattan is, as Norman Podhoretz famously put it, "one of the longest journeys in the world." The story of that transit has been told as well by Alfred Kazin, Norman Mailer, Jay Neugeboren, Vivian Gornick, Kate Simon, and a score of others. In Charyn's case, the mode of escaping the Bronx was via Manhattan's High School of Music and Art, followed by Columbia University, and much globetrotting thereafter, spending many years in Paris, and ending up in Manhattan, where he currently resides. His relationship with the Bronx has consequently been largely one of memory.

In an author's note to his current book, *Bitter Bronx: Thirteen Stories*, he writes eloquently of that relationship:

For a long time I couldn't go back to the Bronx. It felt like a shriek inside my skull, or a wound that had been stitched over by some insane surgeon, and I didn't dare undo any of the stitches. It was the land of deprivation, a world without books or libraries and museums, where fathers trundled home from some cheese counter or shoe factory where they worked, with a monumental sadness sitting on their shoulders, where mothers counted every nickel at the butcher shop, bargaining with such deep scorn on their faces that their mouths were like ribbons of raw blood, while their children, girls and boys, were instruments of disorder, stealing, biting, bullying

whoever they could and whimpering when they had the least little scratch.

Eventually, however, it struck him that "I'd been like an amnesiac during my self-banishment from the Bronx, never realizing that each sentence I wrote had come from these Lower Depths." So he has returned, in a manner of speaking, to that borough, though many stories in this collection take place on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, "amid that solid wall of Art Deco pal-



Jerome Charyn, New York City, late 1970s

aces along Central Park West" to which Charyn's more successful Bronxites have escaped. The Bronx in his stories is the place the big shots came from and want to forget. They drive around in limousines, have dazed wives who shop and dine compulsively at Rumpelmayers, and, when their businesses suffer setbacks, their children take them in, relocating them from thirty-room apartments to their own measly fifteen-room suites in the San Remo.

Meanwhile, the Bronx lurks in memory's shadows, the place where the financial flimflams that undergirded these fortunes were learned and perfected. It's the place where the super's son first sexually fumbled with a teenage girl above his social class, before he was humiliated and driven away. It's a refuge hidden in plain sight: bandits from elsewhere can hide out in "a particular casbah called the Bronx... a casbah that no one cared about." Like Chinatown in the movie of that name, the Bronx is where the dirty secrets are kept: where the undesired child has been put away in an institution. Charyn has confessed to his fascination with Raymond Chandler, and one story, "Little Sister," contains enough echoes of *The Big Sleep* to work as an homage.

There's very little to be found about today's Bronx in these stories. Charyn has no desire to play at sociology or research. He dwells here on a handful of landmarks that affected his childhood—the Loew's Paradise, William Howard Taft high school, the Lorelei

apartments, the classy Grand Concourse of the 1950s, Arthur Avenue's restaurant row—and he shapes these prelapsarian institutions into a personal mythology. The great event dividing before and after is seen as the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway.

"Robert Moses' highway serves as a not so silent character in these stories, a phantom that crawls between the lines," he tells us in the author's note. It helped turn the South Bronx into "the poorest, most crowded barrio east of Mississippi." Though urbanists

today acknowledge that Moses also made substantial contributions to the city's betterment, Charyn is not having any of it. A dedicated student of crime, he sees Moses's intervention as the ultimate felony: uricide. The Bronx "never recovered from the highway Robert Moses had plowed right through it... Robert Moses's highway was like the avenue's own sore rib."

Whether writing about Yiddish theater or silent film or movie palaces or old Bronx neighborhoods, Charyn is the curator, celebrant, and mourner of lost worlds. "Angela was born a little too late, after the Loew's Paradise had been chopped into pieces," he writes in one story, "The Cat Lady's Kiss." An Albanian chieftain hankers after an Italian girl, Angela, who works at a market on Arthur Avenue. Finally persuaded to accept the chieftain's marriage proposal, she discovers that her spouse is a female. Or as Charyn puts it, springing his plot surprise: "The lord of all the Albanians in the Bronx had a clit." This doesn't bother Angela, who likes women, but the chieftain's gang is incensed and they kill their leader when he/she shows up in a dress. Angela then goes back to working on Arthur Avenue as if nothing has happened, "as if she'd dreamt of that warrior king from Little Albania..." Sleep and dream close many of these stories, erasing the complications that preceded.

Now in his late seventies, Charyn retains his youthful enthusiasm for gangsters (Frank Costello, Louis Lepke, and

Meyer Lansky all turn up in his fiction), con artists, gamblers, chiselers, and beauties of all types, which he credits in part to his early infatuation with the movies. In his excellent 1989 collection, *Movieland: Hollywood and the Great American Dream Culture*, he wrote:

I can say without melodrama, or malice, that Hollywood ruined my life. It's left me in a state of constant adolescence, searching for a kind of love that was invented by Louis B. Mayer and his brother moguls at Paramount and Columbia and Twentieth Century-Fox.

I've hungered for dream women, like Rita Hayworth, whose message has always been that love is a deadly thing, a system of divine punishment. Whatever she might say or do, Rita couldn't care less. She was so powerful she could perform the most erotic dance by simply taking off her gloves (in *Gilda*).

Charyn's women characters, from the ones in a pair of memoirs (which read more like fiction) about growing up in the Bronx, *The Dark Lady of Belorussia* and *The Black Swan*, to the latest stories in *Bitter Bronx*, tend to be angelic, hypnotic, or crooked femmes fatales who might have stepped down from the screen.

Not only was his erotic imagination spawned by movies; equally important were the dreaming-while-wide-awake aspect, the flashbacks and jump cuts rearranging time, and the preposterous yet engrossing plots of pictures like *Gilda*:

Movie time has its own logic and laws, related to little else in our lives.... We dream our way through all these events, involved with the crazy continuum of present, future, and past....

Finally, he took from movies a certain disembodied, spectral quality. While engrossed in a film, "I'm a ghost 'on the wrong side of the celluloid,' almost as immaterial as those figures I'm watching, involved in their ghostly dance."

In *Movieland*, he quotes approvingly Chandler's statement that film was

not a transplanted literary or dramatic art... it is much closer to music, in the sense that its finest effects can be independent of precise meaning, that its transitions can be more eloquent than high-lit scenes, and that its dissolves and camera movements, which cannot be censored, are often more emotionally effective than its plots, which can.

It seems to me that Charyn, who'd taught film and written for the director Otto Preminger, has tried to incorporate these cinephile lessons into his latest collection of short stories. There are passages that freeze-frame on an image; past and present are shuffled and reshuffled; and complex plots defer to lyrical cutaways.

The word "shadows" recurs ritually throughout, not just as noir backlighting but as perhaps a crepuscular intimation of mortality on the part of an

aging author, or a feared dissolution of identity: “She was searching for shadows and ghosts, and for the shadow of herself.” And of course, “Robert Moses’ ghost had come back again and again to haunt the neighborhoods he had ruined.”

Ghosts pop up everywhere, both figuratively and literally, like in the story “Princess Hannah,” where the protagonist, Harrington,

always existed at the edge of things. He was a packer at the chocolate factory, earned decent money, but he was paid off the books. The factory loved to hire “ghosts” like Harrington.

In a botched robbery, Harrington’s accomplice, Scooter, is shot dead. Later, homeless, Harrington tries to rob a man in the street who turns out to be the ghost of Scooter. He becomes a “highwayman” (note the archaic term) and is eventually shot by a plainclothesman. The story ends with him collapsing into his benefactress’s arms. “Ah, he felt secure against her damaged skin. He wasn’t dreaming now. ‘Darling,’ she said, just before he died.”

Another story, “White Trash,” ends almost identically: “She caught a glimpse of the snub-nosed gun that rose out of a holster she hadn’t seen. She didn’t even hear the shot.... She fell into Omar Kaplan’s arms like a sleepy child.” The prose is part hard-boiled pulp, part Borges, where gaucho knife-fighters cut each other up but the blood stays unreal, oneiric. We don’t feel saddened or affected by the death of these characters, since they

were never fully developed in the first place. Their extinction registers as yet another capricious plot twist in a mix-and-match game of reversals, recoveries, and revelations.

Whether such fulsome imagination as Charyn has long demonstrated is a pure gift or has a downside depends on how much original mind one is able to perceive underneath. His fecund fabrications bring us back to picaresque tradition, even as they make us doubt the solidity of the worlds being so cheerfully constructed and taken down before our eyes. We can admire Charyn’s Scheherazade skill at invention, however thinly imagined in places, but ultimately it is not the plots that register deepest in these stories.

What matter most are the aphoristic digressions, the atmospheric descriptions and sheer knowingness of the prose. This, for instance, from the end of the story “Adonis” about a trip through the garment center:

We drove down to *Shmatahland* in his limousine. The streets were cluttered with men and boys wheeling enormous carts of merchandise—Seventh Avenue had a hum I’ve heard nowhere else, the sound of human traffic spinning off the walls of buildings, bouncing up and down, until the air itself was swollen with a soft, incessant noise that entered showrooms and factories right under the roofs. I wasn’t sentimental about my stay in *Shmatahland*. I was a high-priced prisoner of war. But there was

nothing diabolic about that noise. It was the hubbub of angels, brutal and busy, but angels nonetheless.

In one of the most beautiful (and thickly imagined) stories here, “Dee,” Charyn places himself in the mind of Diane Arbus trying to take her famous picture of the Jewish giant with his diminutive, awe-struck parents. Again, the prose impresses with its accumulation of apt details, fresh diction, and serpentine syntax:

She’d photographed Charles Atlas at his home in Palm Beach, had caught him among his trappings, the mile-long drapes, the chandeliers, the crystalline lamps, and there he was, a seventy-six-year-old musclemán who’d marketed himself and now looked like a tanned monster waiting for his death; she’d unmasked the quiet dignity of dwarfs in rooming houses; she’d photographed mothers with swollen bellies in the backwoods of South Carolina, captured the undaunted look of campers at a posh camp for overweight girls in the heart of Dutchess County; she’d revealed the mad, wrinkled fury of Mae West in her Santa Monica fortress, but she failed year after year with Eddie Carmel.

Sometimes the very speed with which he sets up a story can amuse. Here is the beginning of “White Trash”:

Prudence had escaped from the women’s farm in Milledgeville and gone on a crimefest. She murdered

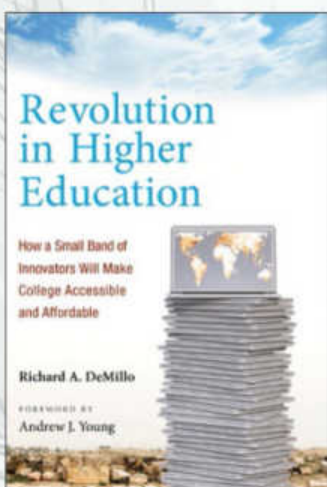
six men and a woman, robbed nine McDonald’s and seven Home Depots in different states.

Are we supposed to believe any of this? Does the author even believe it or is he just having fun with a compressed crime spree montage? Charyn does not seem to be one of those experimental writers who is dead set against naturalistic fiction: rather, he follows its conventions for a while, then mixes in fabulist or fairy-tale elements, referring to La Fontaine and Sir Fox in one story, ending another with “She flew across the street in one spectacular stride—like a witch or a girl who had rediscovered dancing after a lapse of thirty years.”

He keeps nudging these stories toward the angelic, the miraculous, the demonic, though subtly, like in the above sentence, transferring the woman first into a witch and then taking it back by making her merely a dancer. Hints are sprinkled of metamorphoses from human to animal (“she had the feline quality of a silver fox”). The most frequent magical transformation is the erotic obsession: an old man “can’t stop dreaming of Alice’s eyes”; a successful woman lawyer can’t stop thinking about a shady guy she met in the King Cole lounge; a schoolteacher is “addicted to Tanya,” a student he is helping prepare for the SAT test. “He wanted to knead her flesh, kiss her until his mouth was blue with mad desire.”

Like the sudden deaths of other characters, alluded to earlier, these rather Balzacian instances of being smitten with a ruling passion have to be taken on faith. They arise out of nowhere like

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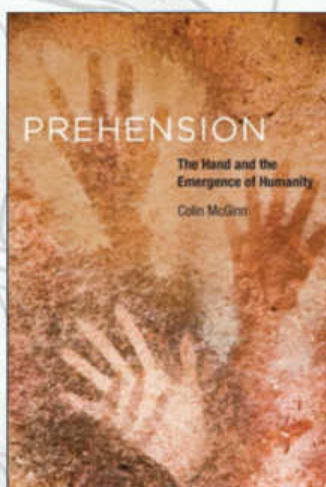
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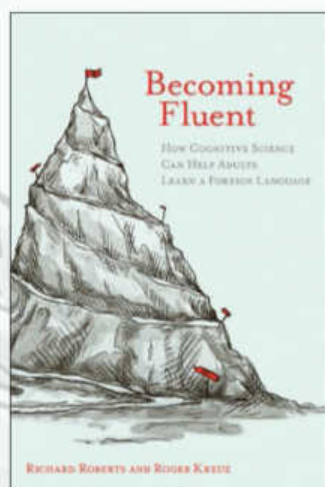
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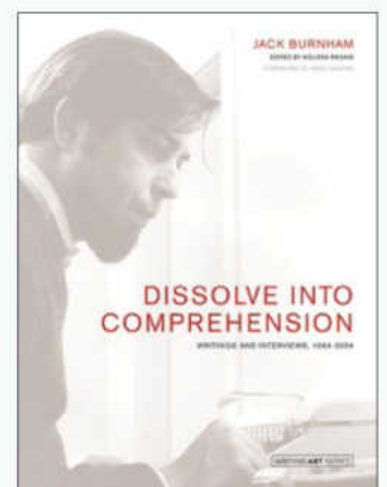
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random strokes of fortune or misfortune. Clearly useful to the storyteller in giving narrative ballast to an otherwise balky story, they also point to what might be called the Rita Hayworth effect: the intrusion of some uncanny, bedazzling presence into mundane, frumpy, everyday reality.

Is Charyn truly a romantic or a trickster? Hard to say, on the basis of these

entertaining stories: probably both. They are written with confidence, fluidity, mischievous aplomb, and a lifetime's worth of acquired literary skill. A light ironic touch peeps through these tales of doomed passion, as though the septuagenarian Charyn were mocking his own former searching for a movie-type love, his previous "constant adolescence" of hungering for dream women. Rather like Luis Buñuel in his last movie, *That Obscure*

Object of Desire, skeptically casting two actresses in the part of the femme fatale, as though finally it doesn't matter who or what proves to be the precipitating instrument of male folly, we come around to the author's cheerful pessimism. One way or another, it is not going to work out.

All that infatuation and remorse has pulled Charyn back into the Bronx, the fetal cradle where the trouble started. You can take the boy out of the Bronx,

apparently, but you can't take the Bronx out of the boy. Yet in spite of the book's title and his initial dread about returning, Charyn is not here expressing bitterness toward the Bronx; if anything, he seems retrospectively fond of the place, overall. What bitter feeling he has is directed toward a world that is increasingly polarized between rich and poor, that does not know how to prize or preserve a grungy, lower-middle-class paradise like the Bronx of his youth. □

The Years of Rage

James Lardner

**The Black Panthers:
Vanguard of the Revolution**
a film directed by Stanley Nelson

**Days of Rage:
America's Radical Underground,
the FBI, and the Forgotten Age
of Revolutionary Violence**
by Bryan Burroughs.
Penguin, 585 pp., \$29.95

**The Day the '60s Died:
The Kent State Shootings**
a PBS documentary directed
by Jonathan Halperin; produced
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and Anna Bowers

The Black Revolution on Campus
by Martha Biondi.
University of California Press,
356 pp., \$34.95; \$29.95 (paper)

1971
a film directed by Johanna Hamilton

Many Americans were drawn into political activism during the 1960s, and many became dissatisfied with the established and accepted means of protest. By the end of the decade, such doubts were widespread in both of the great overlapping movements of the time. Opponents of the Vietnam War could tell themselves they had unseated a president, Lyndon Johnson, and helped turn public opinion around. But the war continued, and when the Moratorium demonstrations of November 1969 brought half a million protesters to Washington, the new president, Richard Nixon, told the country that he would "under no circumstances... be affected whatever" by such actions.

In the pursuit of justice for African-Americans, the way forward was also unclear. Hard-won legal and legislative victories had failed to deliver the promised results, and the civil rights movement, rooted in the church and the South, seemed short of answers to the problems of black people living in the cities of the North and West. For many, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. settled the case that marches and non-violence were no longer enough.

Stanley Nelson's excellent documentary *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution* is one of a number of recent works that take us back to these times and deliberations. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense began as a neighborhood watch of armed young men monitoring encoun-



Kathleen Cleaver, the Black Panthers' communications secretary, the first woman member of the party's Central Committee, and the wife of the party's information minister, Eldridge Cleaver, Oakland, 1968; from Stanley Nelson's film *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*

ters between the police and African-Americans in Oakland, California. They would "maintain a legal distance" and "observe these so-called law officers in the performance of their duties," one of the original Panthers recalls in the film. They wore leather jackets and berets and cast a wide spell. "If you were a young man living in the city anywhere," the late Julian Bond tells us, "you wanted to be like this, you wanted to look like this, you wanted to act like this, you wanted to talk like this."

The armed patrols were short-lived, lasting only as long as a California law allowing unconcealed weapons to be carried in public. (As soon as the Panthers took advantage of that statute, Republicans and Democrats came together to repeal it.) By 1968 and 1969, when the Panthers went national and their ranks swelled, they were downplaying talk of guns or violence and seeking to become known more as community organizers and providers of social services, including medical clinics,

a shuttle bus operation for relatives of prison inmates, and free breakfasts for schoolchildren.

This is, by the filmmaker's choice, a bottom-up view of the party. We learn next to nothing about the early lives of its cofounders, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, and Nelson glides lightly over such matters as how the many Panther programs were financed, other than through the sale of the party newspaper—the explanation offered by one former Panther. The film's great achievement is to capture the enthusiasm and energy of the men and women (about half and half eventually) who formed the rank-and-file. "We knew the party we were in, and not the whole thing," says Ericka Huggins, who joined early and wound up serving as director of a Panther elementary and preschool in Oakland.

One thing that united all Panthers, though, was their commitment to the cause that, during Newton's three years in prison on charges of killing an Oakland police officer, got reduced to the words "Free Huey"—words "spray-painted on countless walls and fences," we hear the anchorman David Brinkley noting at the time. Newton, the film makes clear, served the party best when he was behind bars and had to leave the leading to others. One of the basic tenets of his political creed was a faith in the revolutionary utility of criminals and thugs, or what Karl Marx (more skeptically) called the lumpenproletariat. From joyous scenes of Newton's release in August 1970, the documentary moves quickly to recollections of him installed in a penthouse apartment, surrounded by ex-inmate enforcers, presiding over an effort to organize the Oakland underworld and directing the beating and purging of people who had annoyed or crossed him. "We had created a cult of personality around a fucking maniac," one former Panther laments.

Nelson's film, having made the important point that leaders cannot define an organization, goes on to confirm the sad truth that they often have the power to destroy one. In the Panthers' case, the destruction was wrought jointly by Newton and Eldridge Cleaver, their information minister and chief marketer, who had fled to Cuba and then Algeria to escape a charge of attempted murder. As the head of a new "international section" of the party, Cleaver denounced the leaders back home for

going soft and neglecting their duty to fight nonstop for the overthrow of the United States government.

In much of the bad fortune that befell the Panthers, the hand of the FBI and Director J. Edgar Hoover was also powerfully evident. Hoover had publicly described the Panthers as “the greatest threat to internal security of the country,” and the bureau used its full bag of dirty tricks to, in the words of one of several FBI memos that get well-deserved close-ups, “expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize” their activities. In December 1969, Chicago police, equipped with a floor plan supplied by an FBI informant, killed two Panthers, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, in a predawn attack on a communal apartment. Although the police claimed to have been responding to a barrage of gunfire from inside, a federal investigation tallied between eighty-two and ninety-nine shots fired by police, and just one by a Panther. It was a “shoot-in” rather than a shootout, a black Chicago police officer said at the time.

Hampton, who envisioned a “Rainbow Coalition” long before Jesse Jackson picked up the term, was a talented organizer and mesmerizing speaker who had vaulted to a leadership position in the Illinois chapter of the party while making alliances with organizations of working-class whites and Latinos. He embodied the hopes of some Panthers for a leader who could transform the party into a national movement with a long-term strategy. One of the many obsessions of FBI Director Hoover at this late stage of his rule, though, was a premonition about the

rise of a charismatic black messiah, something he was determined to prevent. However much or little this concern may have figured in Hampton’s death, the Chicago assault was part of a campaign of police raids, arrests, and drawn-out court cases that had a devastating effect, driving many Panthers from the party.

An ugly epilogue falls outside the scope of Nelson’s film but squarely within the sights of Bryan Burrough’s new book *Days of Rage*: bands of former Panthers, mostly from the New York City chapter (which had been wrecked by the arrest and trial of a group known as the Panther 21), took up Cleaver’s call to go underground and operate as urban guerrillas under the “Black Liberation Army” banner. It was a decentralized operation. Cleaver preferred to communicate with the troops through occasional audio recordings, known as “voodoo tapes”; carried across the Atlantic by courier, they were more theoretical than practical. But the BLA was organized enough at one point to begin setting up a training and recruiting center in Atlanta, where teenaged aspirants were sent out into the streets to kill police officers, randomly, as an initiation rite. The first pair of recruits handed this assignment succeeded, says Burrough, murdering an Atlanta officer named James Greene in November 1971. Before a second pair could find a victim, they got arrested on firearms charges, forcing the Atlanta group to disperse; some of them later got into a shootout with police in North Carolina, where

four more BLA soldiers were arrested and a sheriff’s deputy shot and paralyzed. Over a nine-month span BLA groups were responsible, Burrough estimates, for seven police assassinations and roughly ten failed attempts in New York, Georgia, North Carolina, and California.

Burrough’s aim is to give a comprehensive account of the various bands of self-proclaimed revolutionaries who came and went between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. It proves to be a difficult task. In his effort to fit them all into one big group portrait and stir fresh interest in (as the subtitle has it) a “forgotten age of revolutionary violence,” Burrough often employs a heavy brush. “After years of talk and restlessness 1968 changed everything,” he tell us in a chapter about the student radicals who would go on to become the Weather Underground. “Suddenly there was a single word on everyone’s lips: ‘revolution.’” A lot of things happen “suddenly” or “overnight” in this feverishly written book; but it is, at the same time, a prodigious feat of reporting, and it brings out some of the common reasons why none of these groups lasted long or achieved anything that even their proudest survivors can credibly cite as justification for the harm they did to others or themselves.

One of the survivors tracked down and interviewed by Burrough is Sekou Odinga, who spent time at Cleaver’s side in Algeria before returning to the US in a disastrous effort to revive the BLA in the mid-1970s, leading to a twenty-five-year prison sentence, which he served in full. “One of the things we now know, and should’ve known

then, is we were way out in front of the people,” Odinga said after his release in 2014. “A little more study would’ve made that clear.”

“Revolution in America?” Not likely, was the conclusion of the political sociologist Barrington Moore Jr., in an essay of that title published in these pages in January 1969. Those who believed otherwise were extrapolating from the successes of guerrilla movements in China, Vietnam, and Cuba—peasant countries characterized by weak central governments and, Moore wrote, a “loss of unified control over the instruments of violence: the army and the police.” Urban revolutions in general had a poor track record, he added, because city dwellers of all classes tend to have ties of dependency to the state and the mainstream economy. Urban America, moreover, was experiencing a surge of violent crime. For many inner-city blacks (the BLA’s logical base), young men who attacked police officers and committed holdups to raise money for their supposed revolution were part of the problem, not the solution.

In April 1970, President Nixon announced that he had sent troops into Cambodia, where the US had months earlier begun a bombing campaign, originally secret but since exposed. The PBS documentary *The Day the '60s Died: The Kent State Shootings* includes footage of a unit of scared and unhappy US soldiers in Cambodia, with a voice-over of one, Sergeant Terry Braun, recalling the crackly radio broadcast from which they learned that four protesting students at Kent

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State University had been killed by the Ohio National Guard. "We were all in shock," Braun says. "The National Guardsmen would have been about our age. The students at Kent State would have been about our age, too."

This is a remarkable film, with its parallel portraits of two sets of young Americans misused by the country's leaders—those required to fight and possibly die in a horrific and unjust war, and those vilified and punished (and in a few cases killed) for publicly objecting. The Nixon administration had a deeply cynical strategy for dealing with the antiwar movement (to which it was, privately, anything but indifferent). One part of the plan, even as the US rained more destruction on far-off enemies and civilians, was to assuage domestic opposition by ending the draft and promising a negotiated peace. Another part was to stoke middle- and working-class anger against what Nixon, in a press conference after Kent State, called "these bums, you know, blowing up the campuses," in contrast to "kids who are just doing their duty... and they stand tall." The effectiveness of the strategy was validated, the film notes, by a Gallup poll in which 58 percent of the respondents held the unarmed Kent State students responsible for their own deaths.

Two months earlier, the Weather Underground had gained national attention by accidentally destroying a townhouse in Greenwich Village, killing two members of a Weather team preparing (Burrough persuasively argues) to set off their explosives at a military officers' dance at Fort Dix, New Jersey. A few weeks after Nixon spoke, the group's unofficial leader, Bernardine Dohrn, issued a public declaration of war on behalf of "people fighting American imperialism," who, she said, "look to Amerika's youth to use our strategic position behind enemy lines to join forces in the destruction of the empire."

Insofar as the Weatherpeople had a base of popular support in mind, it was the counterculture. "If you want to find us," their declaration of war stated, "this is where we are: In every tribe, commune, dormitory, farmhouse, barracks and townhouse where kids are making love, smoking dope and loading guns." Later that year, they would engineer the prison escape of the LSD avatar Timothy Leary, who, it was explained, had been held captive "against the will of millions of kids," for "helping all of us begin the task of creating a new culture on the barren wasteland that has been imposed on this country by Democrats, Republicans, capitalists and creeps." This kind of outreach, while failing to attract a notable following of freaks or hippies, helped turn the Weather Underground into the perfect lightning rods for Nixon's "silent majority."

Unlike the other groups Burrough writes about, Weather had above-ground benefactors (mainly "a group of radical attorneys in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles," he says), relieving them of the need to carry out robberies to fund themselves. After the townhouse bombing, they resolved to avoid acts that would cause physical harm; instead, Burrough writes, "they would bomb buildings of symbolic importance—courthouses, military bases, police stations—but only after warnings, and only at times when the buildings were likely to be

empty." As a result, quite a few of them were ultimately able to resurface and resume the lives of comparative privilege they had seemingly left behind. In revolution as in other things, we are reminded, this is a country where it really helps to be white.

The townhouse episode makes for rather a large asterisk, however, in the claim made by Dohrn's husband Bill Ayers during a 2008 TV interview that the Weatherpeople could not rightly be called terrorists because "we never killed or hurt a person—we never intended to." In any case, they did not advertise their restraint at the time, and in their communiqués as well as their actions seemed almost to welcome working- and middle-class contempt.¹

Mark Rudd, the onetime leader of the Columbia University chapter of



Black Panther members at chapter headquarters in San Francisco, 1970; photograph by Gordon Parks. It appears in the Whitney Museum's exhibition 'America Is Hard to See,' on view until September 27, 2015.

Students for a Democratic Society, spent seven years in the Weather Underground before bailing out in 1977. "Much of what the Weathermen did had the opposite effect of what we intended," he wrote in a 2009 memoir on which Burrough draws.

We deorganized SDS while we claimed we were making it stronger; we isolated ourselves from our friends and allies as we helped split the larger antiwar movement around the issue of violence. In general, we played into the hands of the FBI—our sworn enemies. We might as well have been on their payroll.

Some of the groups and most of the particulars that Burrough writes about are little-known. But his big picture—of the late 1960s and 1970s as a time when the New Left and the Black Power movements went off the rails—is all too familiar. Those on the lookout for an untold story of the period would do better to consult Martha Biondi's

¹Two of the founding members of the Weather Underground, David Gilbert and Kathy Boudin—she had fled from the townhouse explosions—became attached to a BLA spinoff group known as the Family. In October 1981, they participated in the robbery of a Brinks truck in Rockland County, New York, which led to the killings of two police officers and a security guard. Boudin spent twenty years in prison. Gilbert is still incarcerated.

The Black Revolution on Campus. "The Black liberation movement did not unravel after the murder of Martin Luther King Jr.," she writes, "but grew and irrevocably changed the landscape of American higher education."

Black students played a disproportionately large role, she notes, in protests at a number of schools, including Northwestern, Ohio State, Cornell, and San Francisco State, where, comprising just nine hundred members of a student body of 18,000, they were the pivotal force in the strike of November 1968, persuading many white classmates to support their call for, among other things, open admission for all of the state's black high school graduates. The same wave of activism swept through many of the historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs,

where more than half the nation's black students (some 75,000 out of 150,000) were enrolled as late as 1968.

In early February 1968, police opened fire on a group of South Carolina State University students protesting the continued segregation of a bowling alley and other public facilities, four years after passage of the Civil Rights Act. Three students were killed and nearly thirty wounded in what became known as the Orangeburg Massacre, which inspired sympathy protests—and more faceoffs with authorities—at North Carolina A&T, Howard (in Washington, D.C.), Fisk (in Tennessee), Morgan State (in Maryland), Cheyney State (in Pennsylvania), Tougaloo (in Mississippi), and the Tuskegee Institute (in Alabama).

At a time when the HBCUs were widely seen as anachronisms and their leaders were waging a defensive effort merely to justify their survival, militant students and their faculty allies wanted to make something more of these institutions. Their blueprint was a 1967 speech in which the political scientist Charles Hamilton advanced the idea of a "black university" that would "deliberately strive to inculcate a sense of racial pride and anger and concern in its students." The creation of Black Studies programs or departments was a common goal of protest campaigns at the HBCUs and predominantly white schools alike. Biondi frames that much-debated quest as part of a larger effort by politicized black students and faculty members to create space for mutual support, widen the pathway of

advancement for others, and use their own opportunities and knowledge, along with the economic and intellectual resources of their institutions, to “help solve problems in poor Black communities.”

Their activism spurred a powerful conservative backlash, but nevertheless had profound long-term effects, Biondi says, on admissions and hiring practices, black attendance and graduation rates, campus–community engagement, and scholarship. “While the white student movement of the late 1960s has garnered much more attention,” she argues, “Black student protest produced greater campus change.”

The 1970s and 1980s are often described as a time when activists retreated from politics in order to pursue their own personal and professional advancement. Some of the subjects of Biondi’s book followed that path; some of the faculty activists, she adds, suffered professional reprisals that permanently damaged their careers. “But for many, many others,” she writes, “those tumultuous college years were the beginning of a lifetime of activism, public service, or political and legal advocacy.”

A similar sense of continuity is conveyed by the opening scenes of Johanna Hamilton’s documentary *1971*, which introduce us to a group of Philadelphians, mostly young adults working at a variety of white- and blue-collar day jobs, who plan nighttime raids on draft boards in order to cause “as much damage to the war machine... as we could before we got caught,” as one of them, Bonnie Raines, explains in the film. (It

is based on Betty Medsger’s book *The Burglary*.²) At the end of 1970, they accepted a more dangerous assignment: breaking into an FBI office in hopes of documenting illegal surveillance and other misdeeds directed against anti-war activists.

William Davidon, the Haverford professor of physics who proposed the idea, was out to protect the First Amendment, but also to temper the rage of dissenters who might be leaning toward violence. That motive was very much in the mind of Reverend Daniel Berrigan, the Jesuit priest who had pioneered the practice of stealing and destroying draft records. After the townhouse bombing, Berrigan issued an open letter to the Weather Underground commending a “new kind of anger which is both useful in communicating and imaginative and slow-burning, to fuel the long haul of our lives.”

Davidon had concluded that a big-city FBI office would have too much security. He chose the small regional office in the town of Media, Pennsylvania, which was improbably located on the second floor of an apartment building and had an ordinary five-cylinder lock on the door—easily beaten by their designated breaker-in, Keith Forsyth, who made his living as a part-time cabdriver and had prepared for the mission by taking a correspondence course in locksmithing. The Citizens Commission to Investigate the FBI, as

²*The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover’s Secret FBI* (Knopf, 2014); reviewed in these pages by Aryeh Neier, October 23, 2014.

they designated themselves, came away with 50,000 pages of material, and with findings (including the first public evidence of COINTELPRO and its “black-bag” operations) that far exceeded their vague hopes.

Although the documents they stole included abundant proof of illegal activities directed at the antiwar movement, it turned out that the bureau viewed the Panthers and other Black Power groups as a much more serious enemy. “I cannot overemphasize the importance of expeditious, thorough, and discreet handling of these cases,” Hoover wrote in a memo about the need to monitor black student groups even if they had never been involved in a disturbance. That priority probably explains a 1970 directive authorizing agents to recruit and pay informants as young as eighteen, rather than twenty-one, the previous cut-off age.

The Media burglary led by a direct if far from swift path to the Church Committee hearings of 1975, and then to the first modest legal limits on FBI activities. Perhaps just as important, Davidon and his colleagues had set off a wave of disclosures that took the FBI down a healthy several notches from the place of national worship it had occupied. By 1976, the Justice Department had launched multiple investigations of FBI crimes.

One result, according to Burrough, was consternation in what was known as Squad 47, a unit largely devoted to the pursuit of the Weather Underground. “The men of Squad 47 panicked,” he writes, “furiously disposing of thousands of pages of Weather-related internal documents.” A combi-

nation of tainted and missing evidence forced the government to abandon many cases. One of the beneficiaries was Bernardine Dohrn, who had made the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list in the early 1970s. By December 1980, when she and Ayers surrendered in Chicago, it had become apparent, says Burrough, that “no one was looking for them anymore.”

The Media burglars escaped their own FBI dragnet. In fact, they kept their crime to themselves for forty years, until most of them agreed to go public in Medsger’s book. It was only through that exercise that they came to understand how much they had done to reverse the police-state tide of the Nixon years.

The documentary, like the book, identifies their break-in as the first in a line of conscience-driven disclosures of government offenses against privacy and the rights of speech, association, and dissent, continuing on up to the NSA leaks of Edward Snowden. The Media burglars also compel our interest because they wrestled hard with a broader, and equally persistent, question: how to work for deep and necessary change when the obvious forms of advocacy, to say nothing of the workings of our corrupted democracy, seem unavailing. Their efforts, like those described by Biondi, remind us that alongside the cautionary tales, recent history holds examples of Americans who have joined forces to take action that was thoughtful, brave, sometimes confrontational, occasionally illegal, and ultimately fruitful, leaving us with a better country and more grounds for hope. □



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Like some procession of tireless penitents, much of the academic community continues to beat its collective breast and bewail its sins when it comes to Eastern studies. This attitude has persisted at least since 1978, when Edward W. Said published *Orientalism*, a book of which it can (or should) be meekly stated that it has been both influential and deleterious, especially in the credo it spawned—a credo that continues to infuse the field of postcolonial studies with inexhaustible self-righteousness.

Said's book focused on Islam but a substantial chunk was devoted to India as well. And it almost exclusively called to account British Indologists, beginning with William Jones, as first and foremost useful agents of colonial imperialism, albeit with a noble philological aura. That certainly could be applied to India.

As it happens, though, in the golden age of Indology the greatest practitioners were German, or else French (from Abel Bergaigne and Sylvain Lévi to Marcel Mauss and Louis Renou), or Dutch, such as Willem Caland, rather than British. And as Said himself acknowledged, nineteenth-century Germany had no special national interests in India. Then why such a plethora of research and publications, if there was no power base eager to exploit them? To attribute motives of collusion with colonial interests to such scholars as Hermann Oldenberg, Albrecht Weber, Paul Deussen, Heinrich Zimmer Sr., Theodor Aufrecht, or Heinrich Lüders is simply laughable, as well as implausible. In its disregard of those names, Said's book can be considered a generalized defamation. Those scholars had only one driving impulse: to understand. Nothing more, but also nothing less.

I am aware that these days a motive of this kind rings as suspect. Someone is bound to spring up, asking "At whose behest?" with a dreary fixed grin à la Bourdieu. But the answer is simple—and it applies to all fundamental books: "At no one's behest." Those Indologists were the authors of studies, translations, and commentaries that remain indispensable, though in some cases they date back more than a century. Their names barely make it into Wikipedia,



'Akbar Inspects the Capture of a Wild Elephant'; illustration from Abu'l-Fazl's History of Akbar, circa 1590

but we are indebted to them for a fair share of the most accurate and solid information we now possess about India's past. This leads me to think that, even outside of India, what we need now is a history of Orientalism that focuses on a number of scholars who were clearly possessed of genius and without whose aid it would have been just that much harder to access entire civilizations. One example among many: Marcel Granet for China.

Alongside this history of philologists who spent their lives deciphering, interpreting, and emending Eastern texts, we should also have, accompanying and supporting it, a publishing history, from a certain point onward. Its symbolic starting point would be the plan, developed by the German scholar Max Müller (1823–1900), for the Sacred Books of the East. Müller was not a rigorous philologist and, even as a religious historian, his writings today look both naive and outmoded. But there can be no question that Müller was a formidable impresario, of the kind and quality that we sorely lack these days. Working alone, he was capable of man-

aging every detail of a project that was brought to completion over the course of thirty years, and that radically altered our point of view concerning a vast part of the East, from Iran to China, and its immense past. The Sacred Books of the East were published by Oxford University Press from 1879 to 1910: fifty volumes of fundamental texts, in many cases translated for the first time. And perhaps never again translated till now.

It was a patently Indocentric project, if we note that out of the fifty volumes thirty-three presented Indian texts. That alone would be sufficient to cause those now concerned with multicultural equity to boil over with indignation. But it was a *felix culpa*: all of the Indian texts translated were essential ones and, while they may have taken up a lot of room, that was due also to the stunning concentration of great Vedists and Buddhologists in the last few decades of the nineteenth century.

The quickest way to get a sense of the intellectual climate in which the Sacred Books of the East first came into existence is to tell the story of the last volume, which is an index of the preceding forty-nine volumes. Max Müller asked

Moriz Winternitz to put it together and at first he met with rejection. Hard to imagine as it is today, the great scholars of the time didn't think an index was a truly serious feature of a book. As A. A. Macdonell, who was in fact one of those scholars, wrote in 1910, in his preface to the last volume of the Sacred Books of the East:

About thirty years ago an eminent Sanskrit scholar began the publication of the *editio princeps* [i.e., the first printed edition] of an important and intricate work, which when completed appeared without an index. The editor declined to yield to the suggestion that he should supply one, declaring that those who wished to consult the book on any point ought to be compelled to read it through.

Times change, one might well observe.

Winternitz, the author in his own right of studies that remain invaluable today, clearly shared that editor's point of view. But by dint of persistence, Müller managed to bring him around and the result was a 683-page volume that is still a very useful tool for any student or scholar of the East. At first Winternitz thought he could finish the book in two years. He soon saw how badly he'd underestimated, after writing 70,000 entries and realizing that those were merely "the raw material from which the building had to be constructed." In the end, the job took sixteen years. And his criteria remain impeccable. It is with a true sense of relief that one reads these introductory words:

The student of religion will look in vain in this Index for terms such as Animism, Fetishism, Tabu, Totemism, and the like. May not this be a useful warning that these terms refer only to the theories and not to the facts of religion?

An admonishment that would be equally useful to anthropologists working today.

Müller's undertaking of the Sacred Books of the East reached its conclusion 105 years ago. What happened after that? In immense quantities, studies and texts, many of them revelatory, were published. And to a much lesser extent these texts entered into the sphere of awareness of an ideal intelligent reader. Only in rare cases, such as when in the 1920s in Germany the publisher Diederichs printed a number of great Chinese classics in the translations of Richard Wilhelm (among them the *I Ching* and the *Zhuangzi*), can we say that certain Eastern texts won a place in the canon of books that an educated reader must know. Something similar happened in France, in the same years, with the *Classiques de l'Orient* from Bossard, where Jacques Bacot's translation of *Le Poète Tibétain Milarépa: ses crimes, ses épreuves, son nirvana* first appeared.

Now let us leap forward in time by a century. One day in 2002, Oliver Sacks suggested that I meet an old friend from

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his Oxford days: John Clay. They'd lost touch for many years, then one day Clay reappeared, a tycoon who had amassed a fortune in the Far East and now wished to achieve an old dream of his: a collection of Indian classics, conceived as an Eastern equivalent to the Loeb Classical Library. It was to be called the Clay Sanskrit Library. And so I met with Clay in New York and Monte Carlo, where he lived in one of those apartment buildings teetering on the water's edge because of the dizzying value of every square foot of buildable terrain in that part of the world.

At first glance, the project seemed to be an ambitious one. And its rigor was guaranteed by the series editor, Richard Gombrich, as well as by the outstanding quality of the contributors. According to Clay, the individual volumes should appear in the same format as the Loeb series, always in the same color and binding. In order to meet partway readers who had no Sanskrit, the original texts were to be transliterated. That approach had previously been adopted for the memorable translations of the two longest Upanishads published by Émile Senart with Belles Lettres in the 1930s.

The problem was finding a publisher. That process was time-consuming, fraught, and painful, though it finally landed at the door of New York University Press, where fifty-six volumes of the series were published between 2005 and 2009. All of them were of particular interest, for a variety of reasons. But after Clay's death the series was suspended—and it remains, to the present day, an admirable beginning.

It is impossible not to link it to an initiative that was launched this year by Harvard University Press thanks to the "generous gift" of another benefactor, this time an Indian: the young computer scientist Rohan Narayana Murty. Hence the name of the Murty Classical Library of India. The general editor of the series, which cites a quite generic quote from Amartya Sen, is Sheldon Pollock, a highly respected Indologist, who has been a professor at the University of Chicago and is now at Columbia. The "general editor" chose to explain in a short essay—entitled "Why a Classical Library of India?"—the reasons (or, as people seem to like to say, the "mission") that led to this undertaking.

The ideological underpinnings of the project emerge here immediately. The concept seems to be first and foremost to escape the cage of Sanskrit (quite a spacious cage though it actually is) in order to explore other languages and cultures of the subcontinent, which are,

along with Sanskrit, duly listed: Bangla, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Pali, Panjabi, Persian, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. The project is without doubt praiseworthy and enlightened, especially considering that—as Pollock himself has said—a number of these languages might well vanish in a matter of two generations. Since these are languages that in certain cases have completely different scripts, the solution found was to offer an English translation, with the original text on the facing page. Even so, one is rather stumped to read that the texts will appear "in the



Max Müller, editor of Oxford University Press's *Sacred Books of the East* series; caricature by Carlo Pellegrini from *Vanity Fair*, February 1875

appropriate regional script." Why "appropriate"? And why "regional"? One is immediately tempted to imagine a parallel undertaking, say a translation of the complete Shakespeare into Hindi, with the text on facing pages "in the appropriate regional script." That is to say, in English with Roman letters.

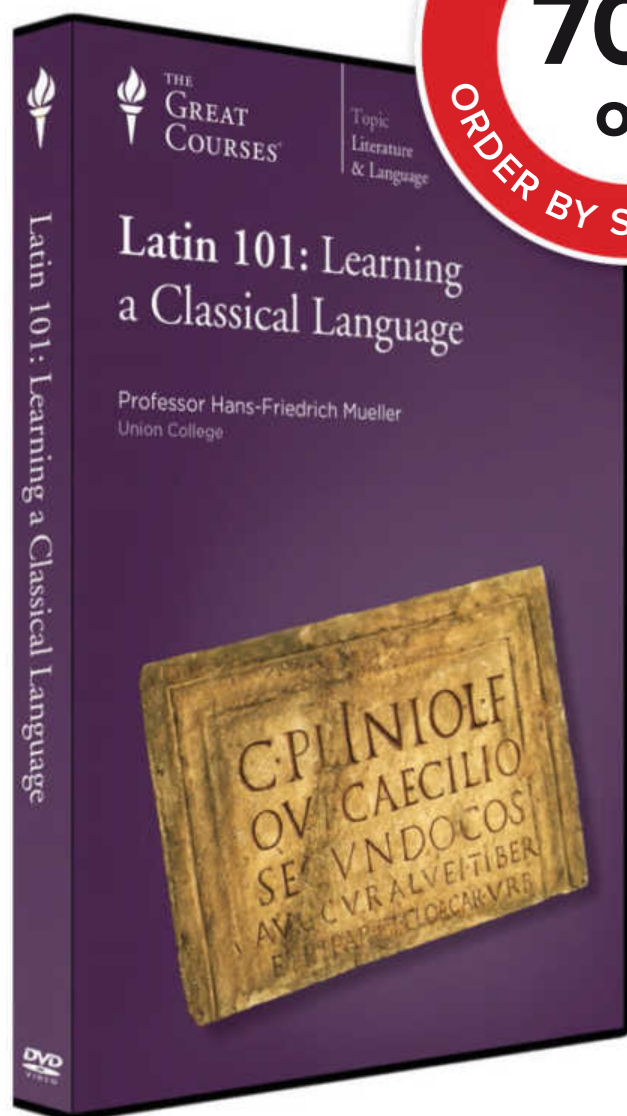
The formulation reminds me of an experience I had in Oxford a few years back. I was curious to see which Sanskrit texts were in circulation. I went into Blackwell's, which is after all one of the largest and most celebrated bookstores on earth, and asked where I could find Indian classics. The bookseller furrowed his brow and asked: "What do you mean by Indian clas-

sics?" I replied: "The same thing I mean by non-Indian classics." I imagine he thought he was dealing with a nutcase and he sent me on to another bookseller. This one, at his wits' end, directed me in turn to a third bookseller who ushered me on to a fourth, until at last I ended up with someone, perhaps a section manager, who was gazing placidly at a computer screen. I saw him lower his glasses to take a better look at me, and then he gave me the crucial advice: "Try taking a look on that shelf, under *Regional Studies*." He was right, and there I found,

parked next to weighty tomes of sociology, two or three editions of the *Bhagavad-gita* and several Upanishads. Nothing more.

That does not mean, however, that there are not a number of important Indian texts in print even as I write, many of them edited by first-class Indologists. Just in the past few months the first complete and reliable English translation of the ancient Indian sacred texts called the *Rigveda* has appeared, by Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton—an undertaking whose criteria could be discussed fruitfully and at length, but which certainly constitutes a radical shift if you consider that, among the previous English translations of the *Rigveda*, as Wendy Doniger once wrote, "some are complete and unsound (Max Müller, P. Lal), some incomplete but sound (Macdonell, Panikkar)." The translation by Jamison and Brereton is the only one to date that can be compared to the glorious edition by K.F. Geldner (in German, but published by Harvard University Press), as well as the illuminating but incomplete French translations by Louis Renou, and the German one, still underway, being done by Michael Witzel for Suhrkamp. I should add, however, that these editions are frequently not carried in bookstores, even the best ones, and are instead confined to institutes of higher learning and academic libraries.

So we can only welcome an undertaking like the Murty Classical Library of India, which intends to inject fresh blood directly into the circulatory system of the English language. Any intelligent reader cannot fail to be favorably impressed in the presence of the variegated offerings of the series' first titles, corresponding to the irrepressible *poikilia*—as the ancient Greeks would have called it—of India in general. These offerings include, for example, the *Therigatha*, a collection of poetry by the first Buddhist women to be ordained,



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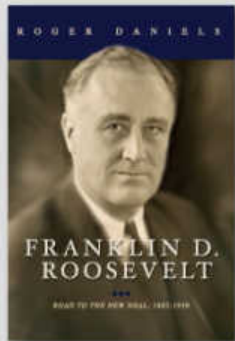
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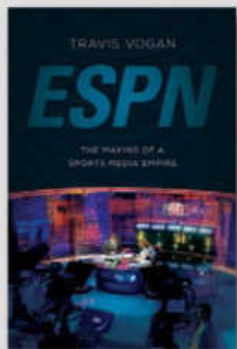
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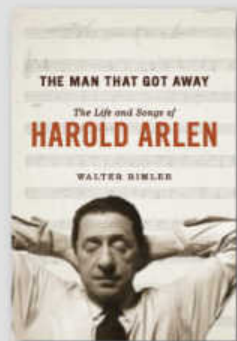
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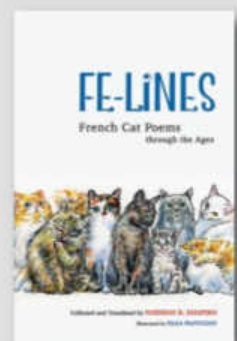
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proudly presented by the translator and editor Charles Hallisey as the "first anthology of women's literature in the world"—a persuasive point, but less powerful than the pleasure of discovery caused by certain words in the collection: "Use what is unpleasant to cultivate the mind./make it focused and attentive." These two lines are worth more than an entire handbook of mindfulness. Pollock has every right to feel pride at including this text in a series of classics (he says the *Therigatha* is "of an explosive power") after it survived for so long at the margins of the margins, ignored and overlooked. And it is certainly true, as Hallisey writes, that the *Therigatha* has been given minimal attention in India.

Here, too, though, we ought to remember that an illustrious German scholar, Karl Eugen Neumann, had previously translated it in 1899. And it is instructive to compare the two different translations of the first poem, where it is the Buddha who speaks. According to Neumann:

*And now, nun, sleep well,
wrapped in simple veils:
dried up for you is the impulse
of desire
like dried herb in an earthen vase.*

Hallisey:

*So sleep well, covered with cloth
you have made,
your passion for sex shriveled
away
like a herb dried up in a pot.*

At the opposite extreme, in literary genres, the same reader will find the imposing *History of Akbar*, whose reign (1556-1605) marked the highest point of convergence among the different creeds and cultures of Mogul India. Or *The Story of Manu* by Al-lasani Peddana, who described himself as the "creator of Telugu poetry," where the reader will be grateful, after so many examples of human beings eager to become gods, to read about a stunning reversal on the theme: the beautiful celestial nymph Varuthini, who fell in love with a mortal and now desperately wishes to free herself of immortality:

*Fluttering glances healed
her inability to blink, and for
the first time
she was sweating. Even her
surpassing
understanding was healed by
the new
confusion of desire. Like the
beetle that,
from concentrating on the bee,
becomes
a bee, by taking in that human
being
she achieved humanity
with her own body.*

It's a spectacular case of a reverse metamorphosis where, from heaven's point of view, human shortcomings become qualities to attain—even the mere act of sweating. Few Western poets have been so audacious and unconventional. We should add that the translation was the work of not only Velcheru Narayana Rao but also David Shulman, the scholar who has most fruitfully ventured in recent decades

into the dense and boundless forests of Tamil literature.

The Murty Classical Library thus offers a surprising array of texts that are in any case capable of broadening the all-too-restricted horizons of the average Western reader. That said, we feel obliged to make a point: the Murty Classical Library lies at an opposite extreme from the Sacred Books of the East, as if the pendulum had made a full swing—and one type of unilateral direction were now replaced, 140 years later, by another unilaterality, in an entirely different direction. In Max Müller's time it seemed that India was simply Vedic India and everything else was shrouded in a tropical haze. Even the *Mahabharata* might seem too modern, because it could not be dated back any earlier than two or three centuries before Christ.

This point of view found ample encouragement in India, where today it is common to meet people who will hasten to explain to the unsuspecting Westerner that the Vedas date back at the very latest to 10,000 BC and that, in comparison, Plato's dialogues were on the level of kindergarten. An awkward situation, in part because historical dates seem to be less rigorous in India than elsewhere. Nonetheless, after two centuries of research on the part of major Western scholars, it is now accepted that the *Rigveda* can be dated to between 1500 and 1200 BC, though it is also the product of an unquantifiable prior evolution. That is the conclusion that Frits Staal reached, for example, in the most recent and substantive study of the matter, his *Discovering the Vedas* (2008).

Now let us see the way things stand in the Murty Classical Library: it may be an accident, but neither word, *vedic* nor *Veda*, occurs even once in the general introduction to the series. At first I imagined this was a chance omission, but then I realized that the same thing was true of Pollock's long, detailed presentation of the series at the Jaipur Literature Festival in January of this year. If this silence matches the intentions of the entire Murty Classical Library it would be a great pity, because in the Vedic corpus a great deal still remains to be translated and suitably commented upon.

This is especially true of the Brahmanas, texts commenting on the Vedas, that constitute the most dense and specific manifestation of ancient Indian thought. To ignore them, as is too often the case with readers—even learned readers—these days, is a little bit like studying the history of Greek philosophy but overlooking the Pre-Socratics and Plato. According to Schopenhauer, nineteenth-century Europe could boast an incomparable advantage over all previous eras because it had access to the Vedic world. Apparently, however, this is no longer true for a certain variety of secular mind in the twenty-first century, complacent in being tone-deaf to all that is religious. And in Vedic India, everything was religious. As Sayana, the great commentator on the Vedas who lived in the fourteenth century, wrote: "The Yajurveda [hence the Brahmana] represents the wall, the two other Vedas represent the painting." If you do not see that wall, then much remains incomprehensible about India, even today.

—Translated from the Italian
by Antony Shugaar



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How They Hunted Down Liberals

R. J. W. Evans

Phantom Terror:

Political Paranoia and the Creation of the Modern State, 1789–1848

by Adam Zamoyski.

Basic Books, 569 pp., \$35.00

In the years after the Congress of Vienna, whose final act was signed almost exactly two centuries ago, on June 9, 1815, the flamboyant English Romantic poet Lord Byron had more followers across Europe than any of his contemporaries. Quite a few of them followed him literally: he was being watched by a legion of spies and informers. They noted his “libidinous and immoral” way of life; they denounced his ruinous politics; they claimed he protected himself with artillery; they even observed the seal on his watch chain, with its suspicious secret symbols. In their incompetent zeal they regularly reported his presence in several places at once.

Adam Zamoyski’s *Phantom Terror*, which makes much of details such as these, can be read as a political narrative of events in Europe between the fall of Napoleon in 1815 and the revolutionary year 1848, prefaced by a sketch of relevant facets of the turbulent preceding decades. It is a vigorous and colorful account of this era of restoration, incorporating significant new research by the author and his team of assistants; and it includes a strikingly effective deployment of Slavic sources by Zamoyski, scion of a noted Polish family. At the same time it’s a book with a thesis, as its title indicates. Zamoyski’s argument involves three intertwined strands: first, that the authorities throughout Europe were totally obsessed by a supposed threat of political subversion; second, that those fears were irrational and fueled by conspiracy theories; but third, that they yielded a new apparatus of tight state control as their enduring legacy. We can begin by briefly considering these propositions in turn.

“The domestic scene in every European country, without exception, is prey to a burning fever, companion or precursor of the most violent convulsions the civilized world has experienced since the fall of the Roman Empire.” Thus Austrian diplomat Friedrich von Gentz, one of the typically extravagant dogmatists of the restored regimes. Gentz and his like discerned a continuing and all-pervasive threat of revolution. They presumed it to be carried and spread by disciples of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, with its existential challenge to established political institutions, religious beliefs, and social norms.

From the start, adherents of the old order had only been able to comprehend its demise in revolutionary France as the result of a sinister plot, hatched by clandestine groups. The very fact of such an open and public rejection of the Bourbon regime fostered the belief among loyalists that insidious forces must have been at work behind the scenes. Freemasonic lodges, which were prominent organizations of enlightened high society, soon came to be principal targets, but the evil could



‘Proclamation of the French Republic’; caricature by Johann Christian Schoeller, February 1848

also be readily connected to an underworld of secretive associations given to occult thinking and ritual practices, which, as we now realize,¹ coexisted with the Enlightenment and fed off its more extreme manifestations. Indeed, conveniently for propagandists on both sides, new and old modes of thought, rational and irrational, religious and irreligious, were tightly interknit by the end of the eighteenth century. There was for example the notorious German brotherhood known as the Illuminati, whose shadowy dealings in the 1780s and purported continuators thereafter could be represented as a menace to all and sundry.

Zamoyski unearths plenty of evidence about the invasive and repressive policies of the old-new establishments that were returned to power or confirmed in it across the continent from 1815 on. He reviews a motley collection of agencies responsible for control and surveillance. Their chief resources were expanded police forces engaged in extensive undercover operations. They could be answerable to rulers and their courts, to chief ministers, foreign ministers, ministers of war, ministers of home affairs, ministerial secretaries, in fact to any or all of these, together or sepa-

¹See the recent sophisticated analysis by Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (Yale University Press, 2013).

rately, sometimes on parallel tracks or at cross purposes (as with the conflicting dossiers about Byron). Zamoyski is particularly good on St. Petersburg’s Third Department (*Tret’e otdelenie*), with its moralizing mission to promote the three supposed principles of holy Russia (Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality) by directing the hearts and minds of all the tsar’s subjects.

Everywhere there were also, of course, regular armies, with enhanced official or unofficial functions in relation to the civilian population. Meanwhile, between armies and police had emerged a new paramilitary force of gendarmes, as they became widely known (*carabinieri* in Italy), invented in revolutionary and Napoleonic France but eagerly appropriated by its rivals.

The figure of Bonaparte was still very ambivalently viewed in the decades after his defeat. Along with continued fears of him and his family (after all, only three months before the conclusion of the peace accord in Vienna of June 1815, he escaped from his first captivity on the island of Elba in an abortive but serious bid to regain power) there was also grudging recognition of his supreme ability to “control the demons he had unleashed, and order them to do only that degree of harm that he required of them,” as another conservative guru, Joseph de Maistre, put it. Besides, Bonaparte had shown himself the acknowledged master of domestic enforcement and

scrutiny: “There never has been a police as absolute as the one which I commanded,” as his formidable minister Joseph Fouché subsequently remarked.

We encounter a gallery of petty autocrats in these pages, all working to maintain authority on their own territory. But the essence of their collective fear was that sedition leaped across state boundaries, that conspiracy was cosmopolitan. Hence the attention accorded in this book to Zamoyski’s two protagonists of the international reach of official reaction.

One of them is Alexander I, the enigmatic tsar who seemingly began his rule as a liberal and ended it as an arch-diehard. Zamoyski doesn’t quite explain this shift. A major factor was Russia’s military triumph in the final campaigns against Napoleon, which enhanced Alexander’s sense of personal power and mission and the wherewithal to enforce his will. “I consider my Army as the Army of Europe,” he proclaimed at the diplomatic summit in Aix-la-Chapelle that had been convened in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna to review issues of collective security. At the same time troops, especially elite regiments, could be as much a part of the problem as of the solution, as the coup (*pronunciamiento*) in Spain in 1820 or the mutiny of the so-called Decembrists in Russia five years later demonstrated.

The tsar’s transformation also had a lot to do with the onset of a particularly rigorous kind of private religious devotion, precisely in the years around 1815. Thereafter Alexander exemplified in a uniquely influential way the spiritual upsurge that helped to underpin the ideology of monarchical restoration. Although the tsar’s experience drew on Orthodox values supplemented by evangelical Protestant pietism, it was Catholic hierarchies that, from the first, had inveighed most fiercely against Freemasons and their like. This was the case even though the associated secrecy of such groups as the Freemasons and their ritualized practices held a sinister fascination for many in their own flock, and inspired a countermyth of Jesuit plotting. In a declaration of his own devising Alexander duly asserted or reasserted a “Holy Alliance” of “throne and altar” on lines already prescribed by antirevolutionary thinkers such as the Abbé Barruel and Joseph de Maistre.

The second protagonist, Prince Klemens Metternich, the Austrian chancellor and prime architect of the 1815 settlement, wore his religion far more lightly, but was equally assertive and inflexible in his rhetoric. His voluminous, carefully contrived, and immensely self-satisfied memoirs record his opinions ad nauseam and afford Zamoyski his richest quarry of citations to illustrate the mentality he characterizes as “political paranoia.”

Metternich favored especially the vocabulary of disease: he likened himself as European leader to a physician at the bedside of a sick patient who suffers variously from an “epidemic” or a “fever,” from the “germs of a moral

gangrene,” or from “cholera” (this last a highly charged figure of speech, given the devastating epidemic of cholera that struck the continent in the middle of the period). Such bacterial metaphors were linked closely to Metternich’s conviction that he faced nefarious “agents” on every side, members of “secret societies...working in the shadows,” of a “conspiracy hatched in the dark,” all part of a subterranean network directed by a central revolutionary committee based almost certainly in Paris, and penetrating to (as we might expect him to say) “every vein of the body of society.”

Zamoyski constantly stresses how far removed from actuality were the often pathological fantasies of those in authority. He writes far less about real oppositional groups, on the grounds that they were comparatively weak across much of Europe. The absurdity of official concerns was underlined by the fact of widespread disengagement from politics, particularly in the earlier years of the century. Serious disturbances remained rare in restoration France; similarly in Russia, apart from the chaotic Decembrist rising and the more formidable but dysfunctional Polish insurrection of 1830–1831.

In the core Habsburg territories of Austria and Bohemia, the Metternichian regime prohibited all assemblies of more than a handful of people except for concerts. Maybe that helps explain why public musical events enjoyed such popularity. But equally—or so the eminently progressive Beethoven observed in Vienna—all the Austrians needed to keep them quiet was “brown beer and sausages.”

Whatever the truth of this, political trials in the decades from 1815 were conspicuous by their complete absence. Elsewhere in the German lands only a few hundred people, mainly students, took part in the notorious Wartburg festival of 1817, which engaged in a series of provocative nationalist gestures, among them burning the text of the Vienna settlement. The equally celebrated gathering at Hambach, fifteen years later, which was attended by slightly more people, likewise sowed panic among conservatives, though it had all the innocuous character of a modern folk gala. Even in Italy, that mere “geographical expression” as Metternich called the peninsula (and he wished to keep it so), most of the clandestine national societies bore weird and wonderful names that look manifestly sardonic or otherwise fictitious.

In early 1848, however, the ordered certainties of most of the continent’s authoritarian governments were abruptly shattered. From Sicily in the south to Prussia in the north, from France in the west to the Romanian principalities in the east, forces of opposition took over, abolishing censorship, enacting constitutions, abrogating privileges, challenging churches, proclaiming national unity and raising national flags, promoting business interests, liberating peasantries. In fact their triumph appeared short-lived; by the end of the year much of the reform movement had been snuffed out.

Zamoyski uses the events of 1848 to conclude and confirm his overall reading of the period. He is crisp and dismissive of them. Not only was there no

conspiracy, but there were no proper revolutions, only an unconnected and episodic series of localized discontents. Thus—he claims—the outcome belied what reactionary regimes had feared. Yet this doesn’t seem to do justice to the implications of his own argument. He rests content with ascertaining the vast gap between perception and reality: a suitably postmodern, but incomplete, inference.

Plenty of clear-sighted contemporaries had long detected the contradiction in the policies of dictatorial governments and had realized how repression was bound to prove counterproductive. When in 1848 Lord Palmerston, the British foreign minister, snubbed Metternich’s approaches on the very eve of Austria’s collapse, he repeated a sentiment already more and more widely articulated abroad, although he expressed it in terms appropriate for the first industrial nation: “Your politics of oppression, which tolerates no resistance, is a fatal one and leads as surely to an explosion as a hermetically sealed cauldron which has no safety-valve.”

Enlightenment had not just been a phantasm invoked by those whom it terrified. It connoted a movement of ideas and practicalities, with a message—however variously interpreted and controverted—that was in some irreducible sense “modern,” a lasting “project,” as its advocates, most recently Anthony Pagden, assert.² When appropriated by rulers it had given rise to a strong program of state-building, nowhere more than in Austria, under the extraordinary Emperor Joseph II, whose significance for this story is missed by Zamoyski.³

“Enlightened despotism” (as historians often call it) involved tough action in favor of social, economic, and political change, and could itself, when thwarted, lead to more policing and censorship. In 1789 it was storms of popular protest at home in the Habsburg lands (not events in France, as Zamoyski assumes) that provoked widespread disorder and forced Joseph into a partial retreat.

Yet the new initiatives had set processes in motion that could not be entirely arrested. Responses to the French Revolution did not, even initially, reverse all the advances in land tenure and management, trade and commerce, public health, universal education, transport and communications, among many other reforms. There’s no need to be a determinist to see how fruitless in the long run were

attempts to build a dam against this current. Denied a more organic evolution, pressure for change was bound to yield distortion and always likely to end in violent convulsions. As Gentz, Metternich’s right-hand man, went on, in the highly emotive quotation cited earlier, “It is the struggle, the war of life or death between the old and new principles, between the old and new social order.”

In the meantime Napoleon’s model of centralized administration made its impact not just in France, but across the continent over which he came so near to establishing hegemony. In the German states reformers continued

Lord Byron



to burrow away within the expanding bureaucratic system (an aspect Zamoyski hardly considers). That was especially the case by the 1830s in the United Kingdom, which consequently avoided mayhem when the European crisis broke—although it came perilously close, as London’s massed bands of protesting Chartists in April 1848 indicate. In fact, the obstructed development caused by official fears about progress probably saved Britain’s ailing and undeserving monarchy and left an unhealthy bias for the future against popular sovereignty.

The other extreme, of complete breakdown in the crisis, occurred on Metternich’s own territory, and substantially through his own malign strategy. On the one hand, he presided over an era of paternalistic inertia within the Habsburg lands that spurned all forward movement: even Gentz had become alienated from Metternich’s policies by the time of his death in 1832. On the other hand, Metternich committed Austria to a crippling overstretch of power as its troops struggled to act as the gendarmes of Europe. Here the consequences were graver. The Habsburg dynasty proved to have forfeited its last realistic chance to consolidate effective and durable structures of consensual government for its multinational empire.

So there was a palpable enemy. Even Metternich spoke with angst and disdain of the middle classes, “those classes always ready, at any time and in every place, to embrace a career of ambition which offers them a chance to reach for the rudder of government.” And the enemy would not go away. After temporary setbacks following the defeats of 1848, the forces of opposition would swiftly regroup. But official attitudes were constantly refracted through a prism of captivating nonsense about secret societies and conspiracies. Belief in the “phantom” of revolution, or at least in their own propaganda about it, inhibited regimes from any compromise with moderate reformers. Even at the height of his power Metternich could not see beyond a crude Manichaean duality between the “conservation of all legally existing things” and their “overthrow.”

That also helps explain the otherwise puzzling readiness of many bastions of the status quo to throw in the towel as soon as they felt themselves under serious pressure. Successive kings of France, or the Austrian and German establishments in 1848, evidently sensed in their hearts that the game was up. A perceptive contemporary writer cited by Zamoyski observed of King Louis-Philippe’s ignominious flight from France in those fateful days of February 1848: “Was it the phantom of the Terror [hence Zamoyski’s title] and its scaffolds which clouded the natural wisdom of that otherwise sharp and open mind” and robbed him of his courage?

It remains a deeper puzzle that such phantoms could exert such enduring psychological suasion. Zamoyski’s

thorough examination of the official mind-set suggests one concluding reason: the bewildering impact of an entire new political vocabulary that circulated in the aftermath of revolution. Words like “Jacobin,” “radical,” “nationalist,” and above all “liberal” were used without any kind of effective representative channels for them to acquire definable public meaning. What, for example, did Metternich mean, or think he meant, when he said in 1820, in response to the murder of a member of the French ruling family, that “liberalism is on the march”?⁴

Liberals, real or imagined, many excited by growing national fervor, were themselves equally products of an age of Romantic mystification. A prime symbol of that mystification was the cult of the freethinking Byron, whose death at Missolonghi in 1824 in the liberal cause of Greek independence—but from fever, not in combat—symbolized the frustration of reformers. It also reduced the future job prospects of quite a few secret agents. □

²Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment: And Why It Still Matters* (Random House, 2013).

³Zamoyski does not cite the recent definitive biography of Joseph II by Derek Beales or any of the fundamental work by T.C.W. Blanning on Joseph’s Austria, the French Revolution, and international politics. Altogether Zamoyski’s touch is less sure on central Europe: reference to “Schiller’s *Faust*” doesn’t inspire confidence.

⁴The immensely complex semantic history of the notion of “liberalism” is addressed in a massive and fascinating exploration by Jörn Leonhard, *Liberalismus: Zur historischen Semantik eines europäischen Deutungsmusters* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2001).

Through the Regime's Looking Glass

Jana Prikryl

Valerie and Her Week of Wonders
a film directed by Jaromil Jireš.
Criterion Collection,
DVD \$29.95; Blu-ray \$39.95

It's one of the ironies attached to Jaromil Jireš's gleefully gothic and priapic film *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*—recently released on DVD and Blu-ray by the Criterion Collection—that it was made just as Czechoslovakia succumbed to the gray strictures of “normalization” following the Soviet invasion in 1968. Aside from the folkloric nub of the story—in which a thirteen-year-old girl is initiated into the perilous world of adult desire—little about this fantasia reflects its time and place. Maybe that's why, over the last forty-five years, it has peeled off from its historical moment and been embraced by foreign audiences, who have kept it in circulation because of how irresistibly it combines some very soft-core delights with the trappings of horror. One of the pleasures of watching *Valerie* now, in fact, is seeing it through this bifocal lens: as the lyrical product of filmmakers who dodged certain limits on their freedom of expression, and as a semi-obscure cult film appreciated more wryly in the West.

Early in *Valerie*, our young heroine learns that her pearl earrings are charged with some powerful witchcraft, and that her grandmother (her only guardian) wants to sacrifice her to regain her own youth. So far, we might be safely in the realm of the Czech fairy tale, or *pohádka*, films that were popular in the 1960s and 1970s throughout the Soviet bloc and especially in their home country: nostalgic folk stories that were reliably inoffensive to the Communist Party. Supporting that view is *Valerie*'s setting, a town in a vaguely baroque nineteenth century that seems still in thrall to reassuring feudal certitudes.

But in Jireš's 1970 fantasy, the dark forces that have gained entry to grandmother's house have a perverse character, and the film resists the plain story line you'd expect of a *pohádka*. In taking a traditional subject (of a sort deemed more than acceptable by the tsars of socialist realism) but treating it as a field for stylistic experiments, Jireš was flouting the regime's formulas. This should be kept in mind as one absorbs the film's loony particulars: a polecat-faced vampire, named simply Polecat—campily aware of his own hideousness—arrives in the village and does his best to reclaim the family seat. Valerie's grandmother becomes a vampire herself, hoping to win back her former lover, a sinister Catholic priest.

Thanks to her magic earrings, Valerie manages to slip from the priest's clutches when he tries to molest her, eludes her grandmother's fangs, cures (by means of a tender lesbian tryst) another young woman who had been bitten, and survives a burning at the stake. There's also a handsome young man named Eaglet who gets her out of several sticky situations, and whether he's her brother or her boyfriend remains ambiguous.

Investing these fantastic elements is a kind of pagan lyricism: Valerie's own body clock—the onset of her menses—is what initiates the story, and her

flower-shaped earrings (a symbol of her femininity) repeatedly vanquish everyone else's wicked intentions. That's one reason the movie's color photography is so vibrant: every time Valerie nibbles on a cluster of the red currants that seem to be ever within reach, we're reminded of her place in the natural order. And yet nature keeps being subverted: more than one resurrection takes place, and the cobwebs in the crypt appear entirely nonbiodegradable (and they are lavished on the set with a zeal that's in tune with the maximalist manner of the film).

Valerie jolts along with the logic of



A publicity still from Jaromil Jireš's *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, 1970

a dream, its more conventional vampire plot intercut with odd visions and heightened by a soundtrack of choral chants and disembodied dialogue. Sometimes these dislocations bring us intimately close to Valerie herself, from various appealing angles, and on a second or third viewing you see how these shots often punctuate moments of conflict, as if Valerie's inner equanimity were guiding the course of events.

More often, we're forced to assimilate weirder visual fragments, like bees swarming a sculpture of Adam and Eve, or shirtless men attacking a fountain with huge whips, or nubile maidens bathing in a river or washing their laundry (either way, getting wet). Sometimes within a single frame the mise-en-scène appears disturbingly skewed—during Valerie's picnic with her grandmother and the priest, for instance, the lake behind them seems to flow by like a river seen from above, or like one of Andrei Tarkovsky's eerie aquatic reveries. It's as if the narrative joints that traditionally string a film together had been scissored away, leaving a sense not just of the uncanny but of something formally primitive and uncontainable.

It can't be a total coincidence that other “serious” directors in the late 1960s were also taking detours into the mythic zone where sex and horror (or “horror”) meet—in 1967, Roman Polanski released his delightfully sardonic *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, and in 1968, Ingmar Bergman his oddly literalistic *Hour of the Wolf*. In the early 1970s, Angela Carter saw

Valerie in London, and something of its unabashed lyricism is reflected in the 1984 film adaptation of her short story “The Company of Wolves,” deepening its dry wit. If artists in the 1960s rediscovered sex as a liberating force, this heightened their sense of its strangeness and power to terrify. (In *Hour of the Wolf*, one of the first things Max von Sydow's character says about the demons haunting him is that he suspects one of them “is homosexual.”)

For Jireš, too, filming what you might call a surreal polychrome coming-of-age vampire costume drama was a departure, to say the least. He was one of

the most intelligent young directors of the Czechoslovak New Wave, and his first feature, *The Cry* (1963), is considered to have launched the formally inventive work that would emerge from the state-funded Barrandov Studios in Prague, by directors including Miloš Forman, Věra Chytilová, František Vlácil, and Jiří Menzel.

A central tension plays out among the best Czechoslovak movies made between 1963 and 1969: some are essentially satirical—ruefully realistic comedies or tragicomedies, epitomized by Forman's mercilessly funny *The Firemen's Ball* (1967) and Menzel's wry and humane *Closely Watched Trains* (1966), which might be the urtext of Wes Anderson's early aesthetic—whereas others are lyrical to the point of stylistic anarchy, such as Chytilová's manic, narrative-defying *Daisies* (1966) or Vlácil's stark immersion in the lawless Middle Ages, *Marketa Lazarová* (1967). Both approaches were condemned by the regime, but it's the satirical films that now appear more politically defiant. Appreciating the stylistic subversions for what they were is more challenging, though in some cases artistic intent can be inferred from just how badly a movie was received by the authorities.

Had Jireš not released *Valerie* in 1970, he would probably be remembered today as a filmmaker in the satirical vein, with a taste for poetic juxtapositions and vertiginous edits. *The Cry* takes a conventional subject—a young couple whose first child is about to be born—and, through a mosaic of flashbacks and cuts between the man's and woman's separate experiences on

the day of the birth, finds its real subject in the mutual estrangements of a country living under communism. But the film's satirical ambitions are overwhelmed by the domestic sweetness of its main plotline.

Jireš proceeded to make no feature films between 1963 and 1969—the longest fallow period among his contemporaries. He found projects he wanted to pursue but couldn't get any of them approved. (He did make a number of short films, including *Romance*—a painfully realistic love story between a Czech boy and a Roma girl—which is part of *Pearls of the Deep*, the 1966 collection of shorts based on Bohumil Hrabal's stories.¹) During these years he was dismayed, he told an interviewer in the spring of 1968, that after *The Cry* “responsible people in cinematography labeled me a harmless dreamer.... I couldn't have continued in that direction.”

The Joke (1969), his next feature, turned out to be the era's most savage satire of life under communism. Based on Milan Kundera's 1967 novel, the movie (whose script was written in collaboration with Kundera) focuses on Ludvík Jahn, a man whose youthful quip at the Party's expense gets him condemned to six years of hard labor, and who later tries and fails to avenge himself. The film's most remarkable feature is Jireš's scalpel-like cutting between Jahn in the 1960s, disillusioned and detached, and his memories of the 1950s; in plotting his revenge, he seems to be interacting seamlessly with the people who betrayed him years before. If Jireš hoped to transcend the dreaminess of *The Cry*, he succeeded: following a brief release, *The Joke* was banned for two decades. But he'd already lined up his next feature project: in late April 1968, the screenplay of *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* had been approved, and for some reason production went ahead despite the debacle that had attended *The Joke*.

The common thread running through Jireš's first three feature films—and bursting out even more lyrically in *Valerie*—is his reluctance to lead the viewer along a single path through the story. The abrupt editing style that heightens each character's viewpoint in *The Cry* is used in *The Joke* to focus on one character's predicament at two different points in time; in both cases, the sudden scene changes are aimed at giving a more acute, more accurate sense of real life and its discontents. But in *Valerie*, a fable whose general outline would be familiar to audiences, the quick and often disorienting shifts are intended to shatter any reliable sense of what is real and to lend the folkloric proceedings a mad, impish tone.

Not long after *The Joke*'s release—not long, that is, after the Soviet invasion—Jireš was asked about his next project. He said that if he were following the trends he saw in the theater, he'd probably dust off some pre-war play for adaptation, but he didn't think

¹Available on one of the four DVDs in Criterion's box set *Pearls of the Czech New Wave* (2012).



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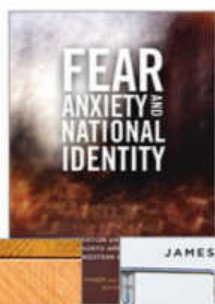


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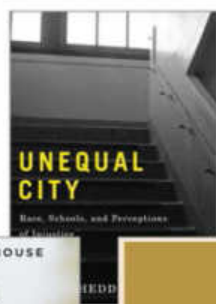
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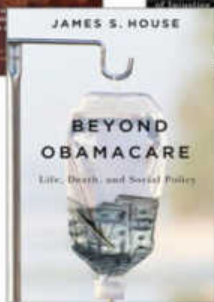


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the country needed that kind of revival just then. Earnest nationalism could

wear out people's sense of humor, which I think is the most precious thing we have. I'm not a very cheerful person myself, but I'd like to take advantage of the sense of humor that's more evident in viewers, perhaps, than it is in me.

Valerie appeared at a contradictory moment for the regime: while the Party blacklisted most of the country's best directors, it also wanted film production to continue and be perceived as successful. Secret police files from 1970 singled out Menzel and Jireš (surprisingly, given the response to *The Joke*) as the

active in the Prague avant-garde in the 1920s and 1930s. It wasn't until the later 1930s that his allegiance swung vehemently toward Moscow and he broke with some of his old friends. In the more innocent 1920s, he had embraced the gothic themes popular among Surrealists. He described his novel *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, which was published in 1945 but had been written a decade earlier, as a "concretely irrational psychic collage freely borrowing from the genre of so-called pulp literature everything belonging to the nethermost regions of our unconscious."

The jaunty tone in which Nezval deploys surreal, often violent images in his novel seems inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*—and is suggested



A scene from *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, with Jaroslava Schallerová as Valerie and Petr Kopřiva as Eaglet

most likely of the New Wave directors to produce what was wanted: "accessible" films. But by the time *Valerie* was first shown, in October 1970, its free-form surrealism was not appreciated. The regime's most official statement, presented as a "review" in *Rudé právo*, the Party's newspaper, condemned the movie for being too arty and called for "other films, films for audiences, films for today, films for a socialist person."²

The movie wasn't banned outright, but an effort was made to bury it: when the Sydney Film Festival asked to screen *Valerie* in 1971, for example, executives at Barrandov decided to send them Karel Zeman's *Na kometě* instead, a sweet little science-fiction film based on a novel by Jules Verne. Jireš, who died in 2001, was nevertheless permitted to make dozens more films, for television and the big screen, before the Velvet Revolution of 1989, and he continued working into the 1990s.

Valerie is based on a popular novel by the Communist poet Vítězslav Nezval. Born in Moravia in 1900, Nezval was

in the movie by Valerie's open and imperturbable manner. Jireš and Ester Krumbachová's script follows Nezval's novel closely—the sudden shifts in focus are there in the book as well—but Jireš dropped a number of causal links from the story, with the result that the movie seems even more dreamlike than the novel. (It's also more illicit; in the book, Valerie is seventeen rather than thirteen years old.) One can see why the proponents of socialist realism were offended. Though there's nothing overtly political in *Valerie*—aside, perhaps, from its Communist-approved distaste for men of the cloth—the film overflows with irrational longings and terrors. *Valerie* might be read as a campy scherzo on the theme of how, given the right conditions, ordinary private longings can become charged with social significance—whether they can bear the added freight or not.

Luckily, there's little that Valerie can't handle. Like Alice in Wonderland, Valerie is a forerunner of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the other strong and oddball females who have rightly claimed their place in popular culture in recent years. I suspect that Jireš, like Alice's and Buffy's creators, hoped audiences would be both moved by his heroine's loveliness and amused by the terrors she faces. Central to the film's hypnotic charm is watching its irony and sincerity, which are braided together but never quite fused, push each other out of the way. □

²Details on the film's reception are drawn from Štěpán Hulík's *Kinematografie zapomnění: Počátky normalizace ve Filmovém studiu Barrandov (1968–1973)* (The Cinematography of Oblivion: The Origins of Normalization at Barrandov Film Studios, 1968–1973) (Prague: Academia, 2011). I am grateful to Irena Kovarova for directing me to this volume and for sharing her own thoughts on Jireš.

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The Triumph of a Musical Adventure

Nicholas Kenyon

El Sistema:
Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth
by Geoffrey Baker.
Oxford University Press,
362 pp., \$35.00

Venezuela, with its current acute economic and political problems, is scarcely a country to be imitated or envied. Yet over the last forty years, through a succession of often controversial political regimes, it has become widely known for a highly developed system of orchestras and socially directed musical education that is now being adapted and much imitated. El Sistema, as the program is known, is the brainchild of an inspirational Venezuelan musician, economist, and politician, José Antonio Abreu, who has pursued with single-minded dedication the quixotic idea that his nation's people could be reinvigorated through a mass movement of orchestral music-making.

El Sistema describes itself as “an intensive youth music program that seeks to effect social change through the ambitious pursuit of musical excellence.” The carefully chosen words demonstrate a subtle balance within the project's aims. The program was in its origins funded almost entirely by the Venezuelan state as a social initiative, though it now benefits from significant corporate support. It has built a large headquarters in Caracas, and over four hundred community music centers, or *núcleos*, throughout Venezuela. Each of these offers free after-school music education—four hours a day in the afternoon as standard, six days a week—to an estimated 500,000 students. The *núcleos* may be located in spaces that happen to be available—unused classrooms or rented houses. The program welcomes all participants, and does not require any form of audition to join. Many *núcleos* are led by musicians who once took part in the program as children.

When it began, around 1975, the project did not start from scratch. It necessarily drew on teenage musicians who already could play their instruments; they were inspired by Abreu to work together to form an orchestra. The idealistic and semipolitical nature of this project, and its subsequent international impact, have led to an increasingly contested view of its origins and development. Reconstructing the early years of El Sistema is difficult because most of the records of the movement have been described with unqualified admiration, under such titles as *Venezuela Bursting with Orchestras* by Chefi Borzacchini or the more recent *Changing Lives: Gustavo Dudamel, El Sistema, and the Transformative Power of Music* by Tricia Tunstall.¹

These accounts have been so positive that it is hardly surprising that there are now contrasting accounts that aim

to act as a corrective. It is unfortunate, however, that Geoffrey Baker's book, *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth*, does not attempt such a balancing or nuanced judgment. Instead Baker tries to redress the imbalance by giving a wholly unfavorable critical account, questioning the motives and the methods of Abreu and his entire system, in particular “the idea of the orchestra as a powerful tool for social inclusion.” It is accusatory in tone, and in the end deeply unconvincing, but it raises some important issues.



José Antonio Abreu, Gustavo Dudamel, and Deborah Borda of the Los Angeles Philharmonic with an orchestra of children trained by El Sistema, Caracas, Venezuela, February 2012

From what can be discovered about the origins of El Sistema, it is clear that it was not in its beginnings the wide-ranging social and educational project it eventually became, but was strongly focused on orchestral training. Abreu is described by Baker as a “conductor, keyboard player, music educator; economist, politician, man of letters.” Born in 1939 in Valera, Venezuela, his grandparents were Italian immigrants, and both were deeply musical. His grandfather founded in Trujillo, where they had settled, a band that still exists today, and his grandmother was an accomplished musician who knew the great Verdi operas by heart. Abreu remembered staying with his grandmother as a young child and returning home determined to study music, a decision supported by his parents, who were themselves amateur musicians.

In 1957 he moved to Caracas to study keyboard and composition at the conservatory; while there he also studied economics at Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, and got his first job in politics at the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the economic policy division. After graduating, he was elected to the Venezuelan Congress, where he was active during the mid-1960s. He continued to work for the Venezuelan government until 1973, when surgery forced him to take a year of convalescence. Music had always been a part of his life—he had appeared as a guest conductor and regularly gave recitals—and during this year off, while visiting the US, he observed American methods of orchestral practice and musical education,

which seemed to have a decisive influence on him in suggesting the potential of his native country.

When he returned to Venezuela in 1974, Abreu felt he had an opportunity to use his knowledge and experience to help Venezuelan musicians. By his own account, in the mid-1970s he was dissatisfied with the opportunities offered by the country's two symphony orchestras—made up of mainly European and North American players—to provide work for young native musicians. To address this problem, he de-

from South America—where it had an instant success. Several of its players were chosen as members of a combined festival orchestra that performed in London, including its concertmaster, Frank Di Polo, who had previously been one of the few native players in the professional Venezuela Symphony Orchestra. He became one of Abreu's earliest allies.

Tunstall reports that it was because of this success that offers of financial support were received from Venezuela's government, which saw the group as a means of promoting Venezuelan culture abroad; Abreu accepted the offer of funding, and used the money he received from the government to open El Sistema's first *núcleos*. Baker, however, suggests that this first youth orchestra in 1976 was successful only because Abreu “took musicians from existing music schools...seduced [a typical Baker innuendo] by the promise of money, tours, publicity, and, above all, rapid success.” He cites in support of this an “older musician” who remembered that Abreu had at the time secured money from an institution ultimately funded by the Venezuelan Ministry of Higher Education, as if this were in some way a suspect activity.

Abreu himself, quoted by Tunstall, was clear and open in his appeal to the then president, Carlos Andrés Pérez:

I told him that I needed the state to take financial responsibility for the orchestra, to consider it a state project. Most important, I told him I needed support not as an artistic project, but as a program of youth development through music. There was a Ministry of Youth at the time, and I knew that was the ideal place for us.

For thirty years, Abreu received support from Venezuela's successive social democratic governments, and it was in large part because of his relationships with those governments that the movement flourished. According to Baker, the composer René Rojas said of Abreu that “when there are changes of government or cabinet, the first thing he does is offer up a concert to the new leading figures.” (He would not be the first artist in history to do so in the search for patronage.) When Hugo Chávez came to power in 1999, Abreu won his backing by emphasizing that El Sistema was a social project that should appeal to Chávez's socialist regime. All this is presented by Baker as if it had a whiff of corruption about it: it was, however, entirely consonant with Abreu's efforts to sustain the basic vision of El Sistema.

Not surprisingly, there was opposition to the new methods that Abreu preached from the conventional institutions of music education and orchestral training, especially because of the high level of financial support given him. Abreu was able to develop the movement as fast as he did because the Venezuelan education system left young people with free time in the afternoons and evenings, which could be spent in

¹Chefi Borzacchini, *Venezuela Bursting with Orchestras: The System of Youth and Children's Orchestras of Venezuela* (Caracas: Banco del Caribe, 2005); Tricia Tunstall, *Changing Lives: Gustavo Dudamel, El Sistema, and the Transformative Power of Music* (Nor-ton, 2012).

the *núcleos*. Training new leaders as he worked, he created a model of orchestral development that could be replicated. It had the advantage of fostering learning in groups, in contrast with the single-lesson, solitary practice model of the conservatories.

The English violinist Marshall Marcus, who arrived in Caracas in 1979 as concertmaster of a new Venezuelan orchestra not connected to El Sistema, has described how after a few weeks Abreu asked him to teach and coach fourteen-to-eighteen-year-olds in what was then called El Juvenil. Baker implies that the students were mainly from well-off families, a suggestion Marcus strongly refutes: “[They were] from very different backgrounds.... These are not well-behaved middle-class children.”²

While Abreu has been praised for identifying and developing talent, he has also been criticized for passing over those of less talent. Marcus has described the intense but very positive competitiveness that he witnessed in the selection process for the National Children’s Orchestra—a nationwide orchestra that students from all *núcleos* could audition for—as increasing the commitment of the players. He adds that these national orchestras were very much the exception, and many students did not audition for them; he thought that those who remained in the *núcleos* gained hugely from the experience.

Baker uses these developments to imply that Abreu is ruthless. In 1999, Abreu replaced one of his longest-serving colleagues, Gustavo Medina, as conductor of the National Children’s Orchestra, a move that was much criticized, leading to public criticism from Medina. But the replacement was the charismatic and hugely talented Gustavo Dudamel, one of the most successful products of El Sistema, now music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and a leading advocate of music education for all. It is difficult to argue that Abreu chose wrongly.

The peak of the artistically excellent and internationally visible activity of El Sistema has been the creation of orchestras named after Simón Bolívar. The late-teenagers who formed the original Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra went on to become teachers and coaches of a second orchestra that eventually formed the basis of the now widely known Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra. Under Dudamel’s direction this is the orchestra that has made El Sistema famous around the world. Once a youth orchestra, it has retained many of the same players and has now grown into a fully professional ensemble with a touring and performance schedule to rival others, appearing at leading music festivals, producing videos and CDs that are sold alongside those of the world’s great orchestras. How that orchestra now distinguishes itself from others, and develops in the future, is a major strategic question for El Sistema that Baker does not consider deeply enough.

Abreu always emphasizes that the orchestra’s international success was part of the much wider activity in Venezuela: “From the beginning I saw the orchestras as the most beautiful ex-

pression of a united country. I saw a vibrant Venezuela, full of the will and energy to achieve what it wanted.” As regimes changed, he played into the prevailing political mood, and the rhetoric of the movement shifted from encouraging music as a benefit in itself to a proclamation of the social good it had done. In an article from 2012, the Italian scholar Maria Majno describes how El Sistema became an “alternative offer that could be more attractive than gangs, drug-dealing and violence.”

With the extension of the program into the youngest generation, there are now (according to El Sistema’s website) children participating who start as young as two or three and continue into their teens. Beginning with the most basic concepts of rhythm, they then progress to choral work and either the recorder or percussion at five, and at seven are allowed to choose their first string or wind instrument, which is usually provided by El Sistema. The program places a strong emphasis on ensemble performance: the youngest players learn technical proficiency on their instruments by practicing together with older, more experienced students, while older students also teach workshops in which the younger students participate. Increasingly, as the project has spread more widely, there are specialist groups: orchestras of special needs children, young ensembles, choral groups.

Abreu’s closeness to successive governments in Venezuela became a prominent issue in 2013 with his rapid change of allegiance from Chávez to the new administration of Nicolás Maduro, who promised to continue support for El Sistema. Some argue that the ideals of the movement have become compromised by its support of the Maduro government during a time of political upheaval, partly caused by the collapse in the price of oil, which accounts for 95 percent of the country’s exports. Musicians, notably the pianist Gabriela Montero, have criticized the leaders of El Sistema for not taking positions independent of the government. Most recently, violence has disrupted the El Sistema program; it is reported that two of its teenage students have been killed, one in a burglary, one caught up in a street shooting.³ This is indeed a critical moment for the future of El Sistema, particularly in view of Abreu’s current ill-health.

Baker claims to have started his study from a positive position. He is an academic in London who has studied music in South America: he dates his involvement with the subject to the BBC Proms concert in August 2007 that brought the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra to London for the first time. He describes the concert as “electrifying,” and says that he left it “exhilarated.” As that concert took place while I was director of the BBC Proms, I can hardly claim to be a disinterested bystander, but I think it is still worth asking what it was about that remarkable event that led a critic quoted by Baker to ask, “Was this the greatest Prom of all time?” because Baker nowhere attempts to address the real musical character

³See Mark Swed’s thoughtful article “Gustavo Dudamel, Gabriela Montero Sound 2 Different Notes on Venezuela,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 2015.

²Marshall Marcus, “From Street to Stage,” *The Guardian*, April 4, 2009.

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of the phenomenon he is writing about. There was in all the orchestra's playing that night a physical passion, freedom, and exuberance, an overwhelming depth of commitment and energy, that immediately marked it out as exceptional. This was demonstrated not only in the music by Leonard Bernstein and by South American composers performed in the second half of the program, but also in the breathtakingly forceful account of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony in the first half, led by Dudamel's incisive conducting.

When they reached the several encores that are still accessible on YouTube, described as "dizzying" by Alex Ross of *The New Yorker*, they put on jackets of the Venezuelan national colors, and the (doubtless well-drilled) choreography of their movements and extroverted dancing had a galvanizing effect on the huge audience. This was clearly a different sort of ensemble that seemed to represent a youthful ideal of how the orchestra could be reinvented.

During the 2013 Salzburg Festival, which hosted an extensive presentation of El Sistema groups (being developed with a presentation of several Sistema orchestras at La Scala Milan this August and September, under conductors Riccardo Chailly, Gustavo Dudamel, and others), the pianist Alfred Brendel witnessed a performance of Mahler's First Symphony by the nine-to-thirteen-year-old musicians of the National Venezuelan Children's Orchestra conducted by Simon Rattle. He described it as "one of the most affecting performances I have witnessed in Salzburg in half a century... from my sceptical corner, I look at the Venezuelan miracle with amazement... Has the power of music ever generated such comprehensive social benefit?"⁴

The exhilaration Baker felt in 2007 clearly did not last; his investigations have made him deeply suspicious of the processes that have created the system. He pays occasional lip service to the fact that "El Sistema's achievements are impressive.... It has... provided work for many musicians, and opened up classical music to many more people," but we have to wait until page 308 for this brief acknowledgment. Baker visited Venezuela to write his book and talked to many who had participated in the program; but it is puzzling that, as he admits, he did not attempt to speak to Abreu at any point during his research; he often relies instead on the comments of unnamed critics who were apparently unwilling to identify themselves. Even Abreu's quoted remarks are frequently secondhand rather than drawn from his own statements. This is a dubious scholarly method: there may well be significant questions to be asked about El Sistema; but these are clouded and compromised here by Baker's disregard for any rigorous method of presenting his research.

Baker's actual experience of the work of El Sistema in Caracas seems to have been limited to a single day of its activities. His encounters with other *núcleos* are so unspecific that he invents a fictional city, "Veracruz," as the source of his information to "bolster the anonymization of research informants." This creates a regrettable pattern of unsourced innuendo throughout the book.

⁴Alfred Brendel, *Music, Sense and Nonsense* (London: Robson, 2015).

Some significant aspects of El Sistema would benefit from further investigation. The evaluation of its impact has arguably been limited, by European and North American standards, and should be undertaken more rigorously. A questionable aspect of the Venezuelan approach is the extent to which its musical repertory is rooted in the Western classical tradition. When Abreu talks about his own musical enthusiasms he begins with Bach, Vivaldi, Mozart, Ravel, Debussy, Wagner, and Bruckner. Only later does he refer to Venezuelan and Latin American folk music, and to contemporary works. This provides the grounding for the ensemble work by which Abreu's concept of the orchestra is developed. The reassuring conclusion—that young people can still be drawn to Beethoven—can be taken as welcome validation of the traditional values of Western cultural life, and has



thus doubtless helped to gain international acceptance of the movement.

Baker questions what he calls El Sistema's "orthodox, time-honored cultural assumptions like the universality of European art music and its civilizing effect on the masses." But the target needs to be more precise. Baker is unclear whether it is the music itself, the institutions that promote it, or only the way it is learned that he finds questionable. El Sistema's pedagogical principles clearly express the virtues of discipline and ensemble, repeating material, keeping faithfully to the score and the written notes in a search for perfection. For Abreu, and therefore for his followers, that fierce discipline and intense preparation of the young musicians is a productive, admirable exercise; to his opponents it can seem oppressive and controlling. Baker, for example, claims that "El Sistema's learning process... foregrounds certain aesthetic and social values, such as uniformity, hierarchy, and obedience, and downplays others..., such as creativity, freedom, exploration, and play." But that view is certainly not borne out when one encounters the best of their extroverted, playful, exploratory performances.

Increasingly, over recent decades, priorities other than rigorous faithfulness to a written score have emerged in young people's music-making: creation, improvisation, the use of non-classical sources, and the breaking down of barriers between classical music and other genres are all reflected in the increasingly mixed backgrounds and disciplines from which these musicians emerge. Baker's judgment is that El Sistema "is, in its original form, a conservative or even regressive program." If he were to develop ideas about orchestral practice suggesting the need for players to be involved in composition and improvisation as well as teaching and performing, that could be a fruitful reflection on El Sistema's methods. Instead Baker somewhat undermines his case by trying to demolish the entire structure of orchestral performance going back to Lully in the seventeenth century. For him, being a player in an orchestra is simply being told what to do by someone else, and that is unacceptable.

For this argument, Baker draws on such dubious sources as Blair Tindall's trashy memoir *Mozart in the Jungle*:

Sex, Drugs and Classical Music (2005) in order to criticize the pervading structures of orchestral life. The essentially collaborative nature of so much orchestral music-making is something he fails, or does not wish, to recognize. The idea of voluntary association underlay the formation of many orchestras in the nineteenth century, as Baker himself mentions, and it is a crude misrepresentation to state categorically that "the essence of an orchestra is to obey, not to agree." Only through musical agreement are the best performances realized—as anyone will testify who has witnessed musical performances where there is lack of agreement.

Orchestras have been reworking their practices and processes, meeting the needs and aspirations of players in new ways—including, most relevantly, involving them in decision-making, artistic feedback, and the educational work with young people that every ensemble now embraces as a central part of its mission. The orchestra is indeed a venerable organism, a fact that Baker continually seems to resent, and has been subject to huge economic challenges as patterns of arts education, audience attendance, and cultural consumption shift. But the institution has proved extraordinarily resilient and flexible.

What would be regrettable is if the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra and the products of El Sistema, in their search for excellence and impact, became part of an unquestioning establishment. This is an issue that faces any successful artistic revolutionary movement at some point: formed in fierce opposition to the mainstream, such ventures then gradually become part of it, as has happened, for example, with musical minimalism or the early music movement. The Bolívar's increasing espousal of the large-scale Central European repertory to the exclusion of its native music, and its recent adoption of white-tie-and-tails convention for touring performances of Wagner and Tchaikovsky in Europe's leading concert halls, both suggest a conventionality that is not the spirit in which El Sistema was conceived.

What El Sistema has fermented is widespread debate, far beyond Venezuela, over music education and participation in the arts, its aims and its rewards. (A comprehensive review of the literature can be found at www.sistemaglobal.com.) It has brought a renewed love of music to a great many people, and an involvement in music-making to many hundreds of thousands who would not otherwise have had the opportunity. For this it deserves a better, subtler investigation than Baker's tendentious book, yet even his inadequate work is a contribution to that debate and deserves attention.

The case for fostering and supporting creativity as a core element in education, and thus developing more engaged, more responsible citizens, is overwhelming, unarguable, and elemental. As the novelist Jeanette Winterson, writing in the London *Guardian* this February, put it: "Every child ever born wants to paint a picture, dance, sing, hear a story, build a kingdom out of pots and pans." In single-mindedly pursuing the aim of unlocking musical creativity in young people, El Sistema, whatever its defects, has not been wrong: it has improved the world. □

A Quest for Clarity

John Banville

**Poetry Notebook:
Reflections on the
Intensity of Language**

by Clive James.
Liveright,
238 pp., \$24.95

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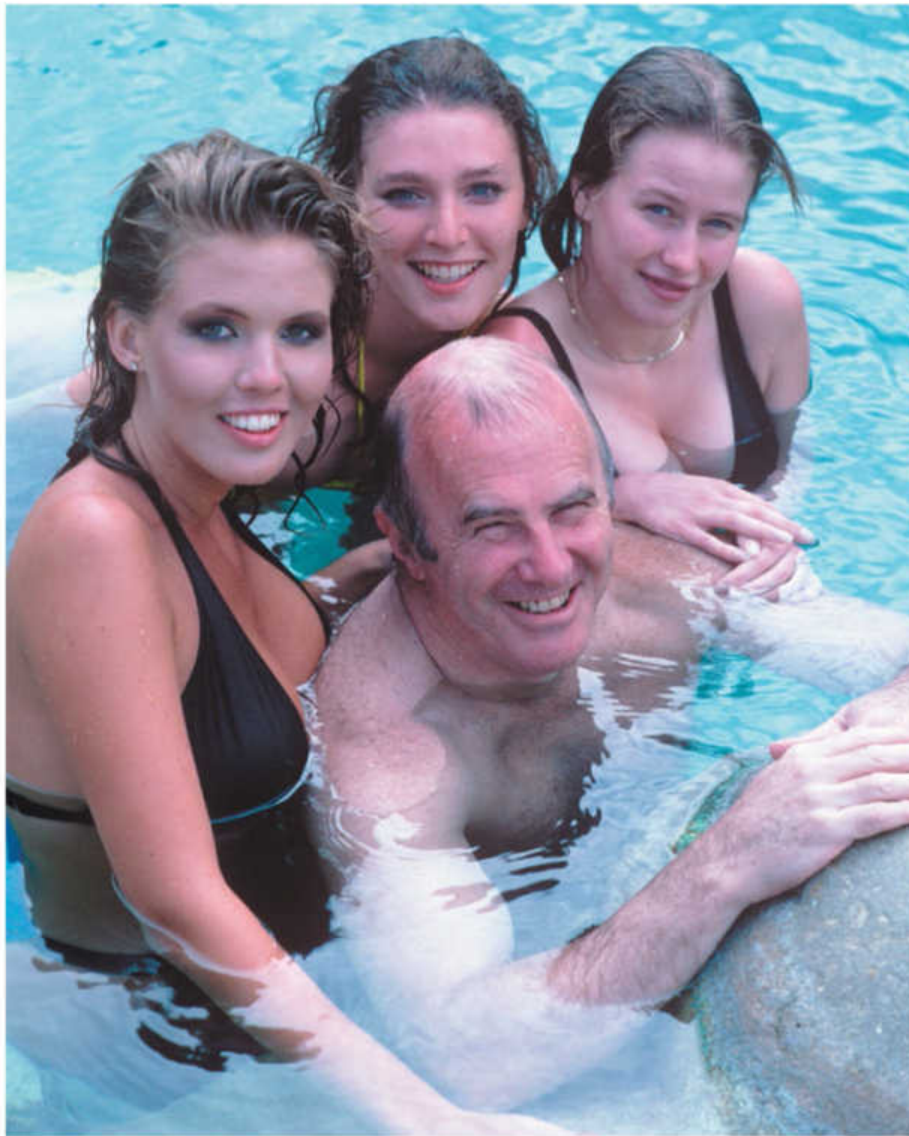
by Clive James.
Yale University Press,
180 pp., \$25.00

In the introduction to his most substantial and perhaps his finest book, *Cultural Amnesia*, Clive James explains that over the forty years of its composition, he gradually came to realize that this collection of “Notes in the Margin of My Time,” as the subtitle has it, could be true to the pattern of his experience only if it had no pattern. There could only be “a linear cluster of nodal points,” working in the same way that the mind does as it moves through time: “a trail of clarities variously illuminating a dark sea of unrelenting turbulence, like the phosphorescent wake of a phantom ship.” It is a beautiful metaphor—beautiful in its accuracy as well as in the richness of its language—and wholly characteristic of this fabulously gifted, enviably well-read, generously inclusive, and always commonsensical writer.

That succession of adjectives ends, of course, with something of a thud. Many a critic known and praised for his common sense is in fact nothing more than a complacent mediocrity who will dismiss with a snicker anything that falls outside the rigidly maintained narrow band of his taste, experience, and perspicacity. Clive James’s interests know no limit. Consider the alphabetically organized contents page of *Cultural Amnesia*: under C we begin with Albert Camus, Dick Cavett, Paul Celan..., while E has Alfred Einstein followed by Duke Ellington. In his lifetime, now coming to an astonishingly productive end, James has been a stage manager and stage performer, noted TV quiz contestant, songwriter, poet and critic and translator—his Englishing of the complete *Divine Comedy* appeared not so long ago—television reviewer and presenter, radio broadcaster, novelist, satirist, memoirist, and travel writer.

He is as well known for his friendship with the late Princess Diana as he is for his championing of poets such as Stephen Edgar and Michael Donaghy. He interviewed, on various of his television shows, a large number of the less than great and rarely good among show business celebrities of the closing decades of the twentieth century; he was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth; and he allowed himself, merrily if infamously, to be filmed for television cavorting in Hugh Hefner’s hot tub with a bevy of Bunnies.

In the way of things human, it was probably inevitable that such a rich and gloriously varied life would culminate in a slow disaster. Since 2010 James has been suffering from leukemia, emphysema, and kidney failure. In 2012 he announced publicly that he was dying and near the end. Three years later, he is still going strong, intellectually if not physically. His valedictory poem,



Clive James making a television special at the Playboy Mansion, 1987

“Japanese Maple”—“Your death, near now, is of an easy sort”—published in *The New Yorker* last September, became a not so small literary sensation, attracting many thousands of readers and a huge following on social media, a phenomenon that seems to have left the poet gratified and bemused in equal measure.

“Japanese Maple” is a magical work, direct, lyrical, moving, and wholly unsentimental. It marked the beginning of a late flowering that over the past year has produced an abundance of blossoms: *Sentenced to Life*, a richly exuberant collection of verse meditations on death and dying, was published in Britain earlier this year, and will appear in the US early in January. And still the buds keep unfurling: exquisitely burnished poems continue to appear from time to time, showing no diminution of imagination or technique.

Clive James was born in Kogarah, a suburb of Sydney, in 1939—“The other big event of that year was the outbreak of the Second World War,” as he remarks at the opening of *Unreliable Memoirs*, the first volume of his candid and very funny multivolume autobiography. He was the only child of a “good-looking mechanic” and a “pretty girl who left school at fourteen and worked as an upholsterer.” In those days his name was Vivian, which became a grave liability when Vivien Leigh appeared as Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, and with his mother’s consent he switched to Clive,

after another screen character, this one played by Tyrone Power. His father joined the Australian army and fought against the Japanese in Malaya, and was taken prisoner after the fall of Singapore. He survived prison camp, but was killed when the plane returning him to Australia at the end of the war crashed in Manila Bay. As James wrote, “I can’t remember my father at all. I can remember my mother only through a child’s eyes. I don’t know which fact is the sadder.”

After graduating from the University of Sydney, where he studied psychology, he went into journalism and worked for a year as assistant editor at the *Sydney Morning Herald*. As his subsequent career showed, he was a natural journalist, with a talent for immediacy and humor, and possessed of a flashing, epigrammatic style; the television column he contributed to the *London Observer* for ten years from 1972 onward set a new standard in television criticism, a standard that few critics since—Julian Barnes is one—have managed to maintain.

James moved to England in 1962, and stayed. He worked at various temporary jobs, then studied English at Cambridge University, where Germaine Greer was among his contemporaries—there is a lively portrait of her, under the name Romaine Rand, in *May Week Was in June*, the third volume of James’s memoirs, which also contains fond and often hilarious accounts of other expatriate Australians of his acquaintance, notably the comedian Barry Humphries and the film director Bruce Beresford. At university

James became president of the Cambridge Footlights drama club, which at one time or another listed among its members Peter Cook, Jonathan Miller, Salman Rushdie, and Emma Thompson.

It is clear from his writings on this period of his life that James loved the stage, loved the limelight, and loved entertaining people. Indeed, the aim to entertain was at the heart always of all his endeavors, whether he was rerunning clips from grotesque Japanese game shows on his own television programs or writing profound and polished works such as “Japanese Maple.” As he wrote in another volume of his memoirs, “even my poetry is predicated, even at its most hermetic, on pleasing an audience of some kind.”

Inevitably, this popularizing strain in his character was deplored by many in the London literary world, not only enemies but friends also. He knew the criticisms he was leaving himself open to by becoming a television star—and for many years he shone very brightly indeed in the prime-time firmament—but he knew also that the money he earned as a television personality “made a civilized life possible for my family, and made it possible for me to write only from inner compulsion, and never to a market imperative.” Still, noses were turned up, and no doubt more than one cold shoulder was presented to him. He remained sanguine, however; one of the remarkable aspects of his recollections of this period of his life is the lack of rancor he displays. Here he is writing about the critical reception of his nonfiction books:

In the heavyweight journals they were usually given to the best-qualified reviewers and almost always taken seriously, to the extent that there were polite sighs of regret that I should be wasting my time on television. But exactly there lay the problem: a serious man wasting his time can easily find himself regarded as a time-waster trying to be serious. Most of the adult papers had already grown the arts equivalent of a gossip column...and in these new message boards any coverage of my work always began with the assumption that a would-be Hamlet had been stripped of his paint to reveal the clown. Obviously I would be running this risk for as long as I tried to circle the ring with one foot on each horse.

Poetry, however, was always “the centre of my life” and “ever and always at the heart of my desire.” The truth of these assertions is apparent in his poems, of course, but also in his writings about poets and about poetry; it shines forth especially from every page of *Poetry Notebook*, a collection of pieces that he wrote beginning in 2006 for the magazine *Poetry*, published in Chicago, and for other magazines and newspapers. One says “a collection of pieces” but the book, although necessarily heterogeneous, stands as a whole as a manifesto to an essential faith in the



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force and beauty of language, especially language wrought to a high intensity by the shaping power of the poet.

What we have in *Poetry Notebook* is, as James says of Dryden's critical writings, "the poetry criticism of a poet," and although he sets his face firmly against theory in poetry, he does admit to the possibility of a theory behind his approach to criticism: "the theory that concentrated meaning should be what any poet was after." Although "a diehard formalist myself,"* he is perfectly ready to look, with interest, if not always enthusiasm, at Hart Crane, or John Ashbery, or even Ezra Pound—"The Cantos is, or are—or perhaps was or were—a nut-job blog before the fact"—yet the lament that sounds throughout the book is for the willed abandonment of coherence. "At times in modern poetic history the temptation to let go of rationality has risen to the status of a command, just as, in the history of modern painting, it became compulsory to let go of the figurative."

In a pivotal chapter in the *Notebook*—pivotal in placement and pivotal in importance—"Technique's Marginal Centrality," he makes the point that free form in poetry is only to be permitted after the rules of strict form have been learned. In this context he remarks that "the whole of English poetry's technical heritage was present in Eliot's work, and never more so than when it seemed free in form." However, Eliot's time is gone:

The idea that form can be perfectly free has had so great a victory, everywhere in the English-speaking world, that the belief in its hidden technical support no longer holds up. Or rather, and more simply, the idea of technique has changed. It is no longer pinned to forms. . . . The general assumption that beginning poets had to put in their time with technical training, like musicians learning their scales, is everywhere regarded as out of date.

He returns again and again, with the urgency of a man who feels himself running out of breath, to an insistence on the poet's task, and duty, of arriving at "an achieved clarity." Writing of Keith Douglas, the English poet who was killed in action in World War II at the age of twenty-four, he notes that the loss was "especially piquant . . . because dozens of surrealists survived to help make a fashion of not knowing what they were talking about." Not that he claims to have cracked for himself the mystery that is poetry; for most of his adult life, he writes, he has been "trying to figure out just how the propulsive energy that drives a line of poetry joins up with the binding energy that holds a poem together." What he is certain of, however, is that a poem, no matter how intricately or even torturously made, as in Donne or Marvell or Hopkins, must communicate something immediate to the reader—there must be passion, which he seems to associate with simplicity. Celebrating that "brief but bewitching masterpiece," Robert Frost's

*In the chapter "Five Favourite Poetry Books" he lists Yeats's *The Tower*, Robert Frost's *Collected Poems*, W. H. Auden's *Look, Stranger!*, Richard Wilbur's *Poems 1943-1956*, and Philip Larkin's *The Whitsun Weddings*.

poem "The Silken Tent," he notes that it

is written in the most limpid of plain language throughout. It's a kind of level-headed dizzy spell. There was one academic—I forget which one—who thought that the mention of "guys" [in the poem] meant men instead of ropes, but on the whole the poem's language is of a simplicity that not even an idiot with tenure could get wrong. And yet it is as complex as could be.

One of the most thrilling aspects of the *Notebook* is the interrogatory tenor of the discourse. James has none of the complacency displayed by so many "tenured" critics. He is in a direct line from Johnson and Coleridge all the way down to Randall Jarrell, Cyril Connolly, and, above all, Edmund Wilson, another of the great literary interrogators. James is never afraid to return to first principles in order to get down to "bedrock"—one of his favorite and most frequently used metaphors. In the introduction to the *Notebook* he addresses again the question that has troubled us all since the advent of modernism, namely, "What is a poem?" One answer he offers is neat enough for him to find it still "serviceable as an epigram." A poem, he writes, "is any piece of writing that can't be quoted from except out of context." But a better question, he thinks, would be: "How do you recognize a piece of writing as a poem?" To this it is easy to devise trick answers, he concedes:

But the best answers are not tricks. They are registrations of what we feel and think when we encounter a stretch of language that transmits the thrill of human creativity by all its means, even by the means with which it is put together.

The *Notebook* provides such registrations on every page. Few contemporary critics display the passionate commitment to the idea of poetry, and to the idea of poetry's centrality to civilized life, that James does, here and elsewhere, not only in his criticism but in his poetry, too. "Sunset Hails a Rising," the closing poem in the volume *Sentenced to Life*, has epigraphs from Marlowe after Ovid and from Valéry, which James translates in the last two lines of the first of the poem's two stanzas—"Run slowly, slowly, horses of the night./The sea, the sea, always begun again"—and then proceeds to draw from them a magnificent affirmation of the consolatory force inherent in poetry:

*In English of due tact, the great
lines gain
More than they lose. The grandeur
that they keep
From being born in other tongues
than ours
Suggests we will have time to taste
the rain
As we are drawn into the dreamless
sleep
That lasts so long. No supernatural
powers
Need be invoked by us to help
explain
How we will see the world
Dissolve into the mutability
That feeds the future with our
fading past:*

*The sea, the always self-renewing
sea.
The horses of the night that run
so fast.*

Because of their occasional nature, the pieces collected in the *Poetry Notebook* range far and wide. In the memoirs James mentions frequently how in his younger days he would sit for hours in libraries or at café tables hidden behind a barrier reef of piled-up books. And indeed, books have been one of the true loves of his life—he is a dedicated, indeed it would seem a compulsive, collector—as the breadth of multilingual reading that went into the making of *Cultural Amnesia* attests.

got successful, his work was less impregnated with these memories, and some of us thought that he was running thin. If we were wise, we knew that it was only the difference between gold and beaten gold....

If there is such a thing as a reader of genius, then Clive James is it. The pieces in *Latest Readings* are small, but small in the way that a Patek Philippe watch is—in other words, gleaming and intricately assembled miniatures. In the introduction to the book he tells how, after being diagnosed with leukemia in 2010, he wondered if it was worth the effort of going on reading;



Clive James and Russell Davies on the British television show Think Twice, 1970

In the *Notebook* all things are considered—there is even a chapter on “Product Placement in Modern Poetry,” which is highly entertaining and surprisingly illuminating: a mention of Arrow shirts in E.E. Cummings’s “POEM, OR BEAUTY HURTS MR. VINAL” provokes a nice peroration on Cluett Peabody, the shirtmakers who took over the Arrow brand, whose advertising figure, the fictitious Arrow man, “drew up to 17,000 fan letters a day”; inside every poet there lurks a mad-eyed statistician.

Naturally, James writes best about poets and poems that he loves. Particularly affecting is his short but intense piece on Michael Donaghy, the American-Irish poet and folk musician who moved to London and died at the age of fifty. Donaghy, another “diehard formalist,” is a man after James’s own heart, and inevitably he is led forward, with grace and restraint, and invited to stand up for formalism. James quotes Donaghy quoting Proust “to telling effect: ‘The tyranny of rhyme forces the poet to the discovery of his finest lines.’” Seamus Heaney too is a favored voice, even though it was James who in one of his satirical squibs famously gave him the nickname “Seamus Famous,” and it stuck. Here, he celebrates the consummate poet that Heaney was:

When he described a spade digging into the peat, you could see it and hear it. In the long day’s work of churning butter, he could see the whole process with a specificity of memory that no literary description could have equalled, except perhaps his. Later on, as he

the cure for this was an invigorating plunge into Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*. The pleasure he derived from that great work, which he had not read in its entirety until then, showed him what he would be missing, in even the short span he believed was left to him, if he gave up on books. “If you don’t know the exact moment when the lights will go out, you might as well read until they do.”

In fact, what he does mostly in this book is reread. So he ranges from a largely sympathetic but unsparing assessment of Hemingway—who in his later work “overstated even the understated”—through telling glimpses at Conrad and Kipling, to celebrations of his abiding favorites such as Richard Wilbur and Stephen Edgar. As always, James is eager, is *avid*, to point out to us things we might miss or never attend to. He is never merely didactic, but always encouraging. In the “Coda” to *Latest Readings* he sets out, clearly and movingly, his abiding aim as a critic:

The critic should write to say, not “look how much I’ve read,” but “look at this, it’s wonderful.” If the young feel compelled to come and see your tomb, there should be something good written on it. Here in Cambridge, in Trinity College Chapel, there is a plaque dedicated to Ludwig Wittgenstein. It says, in Latin, that he released thought from its bonds in language. If I ever had a plaque, I would like it to say: He loved the written word, and told the young.

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The Jewish Terrorists

Assaf Sharon

Anonymous Soldiers:
The Struggle for Israel, 1917–1947
by Bruce Hoffman.
Knopf, 618 pp., \$35.00

The Reckoning:
Death and Intrigue in the Promised Land—A True Detective Story
by Patrick Bishop.
Harper, 299 pp., \$26.99

In the early morning hours of July 31 this summer masked men torched two houses in the West Bank village of Duma. One of the houses was empty. In the other, the Dawabsheh family lay sleeping. Saad, his wife Riham, and their four-year-old son Ahmad were severely injured as flames spread through their bedroom. Eighteen-month-old Ali burned to death, and Saad died a week later of his wounds. A year ago three Jewish extremists kidnapped sixteen-year-old Mohammed Abu Khdeir outside his East Jerusalem home. They drove him to a forest where, after beating him, they poured gasoline over his head and burned him alive.

Execution by fire has always been about more than just killing. It carries a message. The masked men who threw the Molotov cocktail into the Dawabshehs' bedroom made their message explicit, leaving graffiti of a Star of David with NEKAMA! (Hebrew for revenge) sprayed on the wall.

This brand of Jewish terrorism is not new. In 2002 a clandestine group of Jewish settlers attempted to blow up a Palestinian girls' school. In 1994 an American-born Jewish settler gunned down twenty-nine Palestinians while they were praying in Hebron. A decade earlier a number of loosely connected underground cells carried out terrorist attacks against Palestinian targets, including the Islamic college in Hebron, public buses, and West Bank mayors.

The roots of contemporary Jewish terrorism lie in the radical movements and individuals who roamed Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s. Two new books, Bruce Hoffman's *Anonymous Soldiers* and Patrick Bishop's *The Reckoning*, explore these roots.

1.

While I was in Jerusalem I heard nine bomb explosions not far from my hotel. The immigration offices of the Palestine Mandate at Haifa and Tel Aviv were blown up, and two Palestine policemen were murdered. There are three extremist groups, all illegal military organisations. They have Fascist manners and Fascist uniforms, and are storm troopers.

This is how a *Reader's Digest* reporter, Frederick Painton, described his encounter with Jewish terrorism early in 1944.* The bombings Painton

*Painton's May 1944 "Report on Palestine" was originally written as "a memorandum to the editors," who then decided to publish it. The report did not go unnoticed in Palestine, with the Zionist establishment using it to berate



A British army officer and troops outside of the King David Hotel, which had been bombed by the underground Zionist group the Irgun, Jerusalem, July 1946

heard were the opening shot of the revolt against the British Mandate announced on February 1 by the underground Irgun Zvai Leumi (National Military Organization, also known by its Hebrew acronym, Etzel). Eleven days later members of the Irgun, under the direction of their recently appointed leader, Menachem Begin, bombed British immigration offices in Palestine's main cities.

Begin, who had emigrated from Poland in 1942, belonged to the Revisionist faction of the Zionist movement, formed by Vladimir Jabotinsky. Its aim was to revise the Zionist Labor movement's "practical Zionism," which was primarily concerned with building national institutions and cultivating a Jewish society in Palestine. "Jabotinsky's grand 'Revisionist' Zionism put the Jewish state first," Avishai Margalit recently wrote in these pages, "and worried about the society later. The Jewish state was to be achieved by aggressive diplomacy and military might." On one fundamental issue, Jabotinsky agreed with his Labor Zionist rivals: Zionism's goals were to be achieved through alliance with the British Empire. Correctly predicting

its rival, Revisionist Zionism, and the latter using it in order to display the establishment's treacherous incitement against them. For additional footnotes, see the Web version of this article at www.nybooks.com.

that the Ottomans would be defeated in World War I, Jabotinsky organized five battalions of Jewish volunteers to fight with the British. He hoped this would bolster the Zionist case after the war and create the foundation for a Jewish defense force.

Both hopes would be frustrated. The diplomatic achievement was not to be Jabotinsky's, but Chaim Weizmann's, Jabotinsky's rival and Zionism's greatest statesman, whose personal diplomacy led to the Balfour Declaration of 1917 that expressed the British government's commitment to facilitate the establishment of "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. The Jewish Legion was disbanded shortly after the war. Jabotinsky then organized Betar, a Revisionist youth movement in which a new martial force was to be formed. The "storm troopers" Painton saw were the brown-uniformed members of Betar. The Irgun, which planted the bombs he heard, was the armed underground of the Revisionist movement.

Jabotinsky had hoped for something different: a legion legalized by the British to fend off inevitable Arab opposition, not a clandestine organization fighting the British. The disparity between the teacher's views and his disciple's strategies first surfaced at Betar's third world conference in 1938, when Begin challenged Jabotinsky's diplomatic strategy of appealing to the world's conscience; Begin called for a shift to "militant Zionism." As

Bruce Hoffman puts it in his new book, *Anonymous Soldiers*:

A stunned Jabotinsky repeatedly interrupted his disciple's speech, disputing his historical analogies and sarcastically questioning the practical implications of Begin's call to embrace a new phase of Zionism—predicated on armed struggle.

Minutes of the conference further reveal that Jabotinsky ridiculed Begin, comparing his speech to the "senseless and useless" noise of a squeaky door. By some accounts, Begin left the hall in tears. Exploring the ideological roots of this divide is indispensable for understanding Jewish terrorism, which has marred Zionist history from the 1930s to the present.

2.

Hoffman's *Anonymous Soldiers* draws on intelligence material declassified in recent years to describe Zionist terrorism and the struggle against it "through the eye of the British statesmen, soldiers, officials, policemen, and others." He concludes that the terrorism of Begin and his fellow Irgunists was effective in hastening the end of the British Mandate, Britain's thirty-year rule in Palestine established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. Britain's task under the Mandate was to prepare Palestine for independence and statehood. Failing to establish a workable and protected local administration, the British terminated the Mandate in May 1948 and ceded responsibility to the United Nations.

Hoffman recounts the events that led to this decision in great detail, stressing the financial and human toll imposed by Jewish terrorism and its demoralizing effects on the British. But assessing the success of Jewish terrorists in achieving their aims is a more complex matter. Their stated goal was the establishment of a Jewish state on both banks of the Jordan River and, more immediately, the elimination of the British White Paper policy, which severely restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine. Neither of these goals was achieved. Analyzing the terrorist strategies and motivations requires attending to their ideological roots, which receive less attention in Hoffman's book.

The first clandestine anti-British organization, not mentioned by Hoffman, was known as Brit Habiryonim (Band of Thugs). Its ideas had dramatic influence over the Revisionist underground and also over Jewish extremists ever since its creation in 1930. The founders and principal ideologues of the "Thugs" were two intellectuals—the militant journalist Abba Ahimeir and the poet Uri Zvi Greenberg. Ahimeir preached Nietzsche's "will to power" as an ethic and took Mussolini's nationalist dictatorship to be a model for politics. He called Jabotinsky "our Duce," to the latter's dismay, while drifting away from the Revisionist

leader's strategy. "The path to redemption passes not over a bridge of paper, but over a bridge of iron," he wrote, expressing his contempt for diplomacy, in contrast not only to Weizmann but also to Jabotinsky.

Zionism's greatest crime, Ahimeir argued, was its reliance on other nations rather than on its own will, purity of ideals, and readiness, indeed willingness, to sacrifice. Such an undertaking was not for the masses, the "human dung," but for the avant-garde few. In the tradition of Russian revolutionaries, Ahimeir regarded political violence as a legitimate means in the arsenal of selfless, pure-hearted zealots.

Greenberg added a mystical element to Ahimeir's militarism. Raised in a Hasidic family in Galicia, Greenberg thought that rebuilding the Jewish homeland was not primarily a secular process of political liberation but an eschatological drama of national redemption and spiritual resurrection. Rather than a political movement, Zionism was a "civic revolutionary movement," whose aim was the reinstatement of an Old Testament Jewish "kingdom." A renewed Jewish temple would replace the "house of Muslim glory"—the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount, which, as Greenberg wrote in one of his early poems, was attached to Jerusalem's "decapitated neck."

With his fusion of militant nationalism and eschatological mysticism, Greenberg was seen by his admirers not only as one of the great Hebrew poets but also as a prophet. His Manichaean world was divided into Jews and their enemies. The former, he wrote, were purified by victimhood but suffered from physical and spiritual weakness, exacerbated by their leaders, who "know how to cry," but not how to take revenge. Against this Greenberg celebrated the uncalculating heroism of Bar Kokhba, the second-century Jewish leader whose rebellion was crushed by the Romans, annihilating half of the Jewish population of Palestine. For Greenberg, such heroic leaders kept the national spirit alive and thus triumphed even when it was physically defeated. "Bar Kokhba's creed," he declared, "is true, despite the fall of Betar"—his last stronghold.

But his and Ahimeir's more immediate inspirations were European revolutionaries—the Russian Narodnya Volya, the Irish Sinn Féin, and the Polish rebels led by Józef Pilsudsky. The two men were part of a loosely connected group of eccentric poets, journalists, and politicians, often called "maximalists," who subscribed to the view that the national interest trumps everything, including morality, and that the means for promoting it must include revolutionary violence. To ensure that this license is not used for personal or factional ends but only employed in the service of the nation, the motives of its agents must be pure. Such purity of heart is displayed by the very opposite of self-interest—self-sacrifice.

Like other romantics of violence and heroism, Greenberg and Ahimeir were blind to the fact that being part of an aggressive, uninhibited movement can also be a form of self-interest. As Isaiah Berlin shrewdly observed, their followers who terrorized the British "seemed to put the satisfaction of their own emotional needs above the attainable goals of the cause which they supported."

3.

A conflict over the Temple Mount set off the violence that prompted the formation of the Thugs and the Irgun. Following disputes regarding prayer arrangements at the Western Wall in 1929, the Betar youth led a crowd to the Western Wall shouting "The wall is ours!" This led to rumors that Jews were trying to seize the Temple Mount, a prospect that is still effective in mobilizing Palestinians. In a wave of attacks by violent Arab mobs, 133 Jews were murdered and hundreds more were maimed, raped, and beaten in Hebron, Jerusalem, and a dozen other places.

The events of summer 1929 shocked Palestine's Jewish community, known as the Yishuv, and prompted heated debates within the Zionist movement. "Maximalists" like Ahimeir and Greenberg blamed the Yishuv's leaders, such as David Ben-Gurion, whom they saw as traitorous, ingratiating, and assimilationist. They advocated open revolt against the British, celebrating the opportunity to "join the ranks of healthy nations" by "sacrificing for the realization of a national ideal."

Jabotinsky, who was not a revolutionary, realized the futility of these proposals. But while he called their proponents a "band of spiritual bastards" in private, he would not publicly denounce them, recognizing their popularity among the Revisionist rank and file. In 1931, a faction split from the Haganah—the Yishuv's official defense organization—to form what eventually became the Irgun. In 1938 some of the Revisionists published a statement as "the revisionist activist front," advocating a shift in strategy—abandoning the "English orientation" and adopting "the path of active resistance, employing all the combat methods that liberated all oppressed peoples." One of the signers was Menachem Begin and among its supporters was Avraham Stern.

David Raziell, whose leadership of the Irgun was challenged by Stern in 1940, described him this way:

A delicate ivory statue wearing a tie in good taste and smart suit with the trousers precisely creased. In short, an unscrupulous intelligent person who so distorts the facts that the borders of reality mean nothing to him. And a demagogue times eight.

When Raziell, as the Irgun's commander, reached an agreement to collaborate with the British war effort, Stern tried to depose him and ultimately left and formed his own uncompromising anti-British underground, which would take the name Lehi (the Hebrew acronym for Israel Freedom Fighters), known to the British as "The Stern Gang."

But in the 1930s Stern and Raziell were close friends, and Stern's function in the Irgun was auxiliary. He spent much of his time in Europe, procuring weapons for the underground and organizing training camps in Poland. He also provided spiritual inspiration in the form of articles and poems, published under the nom de plume "Yair" (after the first-century Jewish Zealot Elazar ben Yair, whose failed revolution ended in mass suicide).

In his new book *The Reckoning*, Patrick Bishop describes Stern's poetry as

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a “blend of grandiosity, triumphalism and romanticized violence.” Arthur Koestler, who flirted with the Revisionist movement for a while in the 1920s, translated this verse from one of Stern’s poems:

*Like a rabbi
Who carries his prayer-book in a
velvet bag to the synagogue
So carry I
My sacred gun to the Temple.*

In another poem Yair wrote: “We shall pray by rifle, machine gun, landmine.” His penchant for violence was coupled with an obsession with death. One of his poems, “Anonymous Soldiers,” which became the Irgun’s anthem (and the title of Hoffman’s book), describes how the homeland will be built from corpses cemented with the blood of babies.

Patrick Bishop, in *The Reckoning*, recounts the life and controversial death of Stern as a tale of grand delusions culminating in abject failure. After he split from the Irgun, between September 1940 and February 1942 Stern’s organization carried out numerous attacks, targeting financial institutions and British offices and officials. One botched robbery led to the arrest of seven Sternists. In another, the fleeing robbers shot and killed two Jewish bystanders, creating derision in the country they were trying to rally. Stern’s ill-conceived attempts to make alliances with Fascist Italy and with the Nazis failed completely, and caused British intelligence agencies to arrest more of his men. Some of his deputies began to turn against him.

Isolated and desperate, Stern ordered an ambitious action—killing two senior British police officers, Geoffrey Morton and Tom Wilkins. Stern’s men planted bombs in a building in Tel Aviv. The first explosion was intended to draw Morton and Wilkins to the scene, at which point a second bomb was to go off and kill them. But Morton had dispatched other officers to the scene. When the second explosion went off, two Jewish officials working for the Mandate and one British officer were killed.

Rather than galvanizing the Jewish masses, the operation was almost unanimously condemned by the Jews. The Zionist leaders declared the Sternists “madmen” and pledged to assist the police hunting the terrorists. A week later four of Stern’s deputies were shot and arrested by Morton. Three others soon turned themselves in. On February 12, 1942, Stern was found undressed, hiding in a wardrobe in a small Tel Aviv apartment. Morton shot and killed him on the spot, ending the life of Stern the terrorist and launching the legacy of Yair the Zionist martyr.

In 1944, the Lehi resurfaced and carried out dozens of terrorist attacks, bombing Mandate facilities and murdering British officials, Arabs, and Jews. This time the operations were much more effective, under the guidance of the ruthless Lehi leader Yitzhak Yzernitsky (who would become Israel’s seventh prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir). Lehi’s most spectacular operation was the assassination in November 1944 of Lord Moyne, the British minister of state in the Middle East. Two young Lehi agents waited outside his Cairo home and fired into his car from close range as he was re-

turning from his office. Both were caught and later executed by hanging.

This operation, intended to galvanize the masses and set off a revolt against the British, was a terrible miscalculation. The Yishuv was appalled. Its popular press called the killers “traitors,” and for good reason. Winston Churchill was then advancing the idea of establishing a Jewish state in part of Palestine after the war. The murder of Walter Moyne, his friend and political ally, outraged the prime minister. “Moyne’s assassination,” Hoffman writes, “effectively scuttled Churchill’s bold plan to partition Palestine.”

4.

Zionist historiography and Israeli politics were largely shaped by the debate over the justification and efficacy of



The Hebrew and Yiddish poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, who cofounded the anti-British extremist group Brit Habiryonim and was later a member of the Irgun, Kraków, mid-1930s

Zionist terrorism before the state was established in 1948. Some historians and ideologues credit it with having driven out the British, while others dismiss it as futile and even damaging. Hoffman’s account is more nuanced. He recognizes the futility of Stern and his followers, who were viewed by the British as “dangerous fanatics but militarily inconsequential,” but finds the Irgun’s terrorist campaign from 1944 until the termination of the Mandate in 1948 to have been effective. He concludes that “terrorism can, in the right conditions and with the appropriate strategy and tactics, succeed in attaining at least some of its practitioners’ fundamental aims.”

Such qualifications are in order since most terrorist actions surveyed in the book demonstrate the opposite. The gangsterism of Yair and his followers achieved nothing except to make him a hero for Jewish extremists. Similarly, during the early 1930s Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, a jihadist revolutionary who preached violence and extolled self-sacrifice, accomplished nothing apart from giving Hamas’s military wing its name—the al-Qassam Brigade. His rebellion was crushed before it began.

Hoffman credits al-Qassam’s followers with igniting the Arab Rebellion between 1936 and 1939. But it, too, was a miserable failure. The aims of the rebellion, besides attacking Jews, were to hurt the Jewish economy, deter new immigrants, and hinder the establishment of Jewish settlements. Yet the Arab riots

set off a fierce response, resulting in more casualties among Arab attackers than Jewish victims and the establishment of the officially sanctioned armed Jewish militia called “Notrim.” The Yishuv’s economy benefited because the strikes by Arab workers forced the Jewish settlers to develop their own independent workforce. After the Jaffa seaport was closed, British officials had to license the establishment of a modern, deepwater port in nearby Tel Aviv. The ancient port of Jaffa—a major source of employment and income for Palestinians—never recovered.

With the specter of Nazism rising in Europe, Jewish immigration continued. Settlement activity accelerated. The British Peel Commission, which was sent to investigate the violence under the Mandate, proposed for the first time a Jewish state in part of historic Palestine. If the Arabs lost the

come less hostile in the 1930s, the hundreds of British casualties did not cause Mandate authorities to modify their immigration policy in the 1940s. Still, Hoffman sees the Irgun’s terrorist campaign as skillful and effective.

What was different about Begin’s campaign, according to Hoffman, was his strategy of undermining British prestige. He quotes Begin’s account:

History and our observation persuaded us that if we could succeed in destroying the [British] government’s prestige in Eretz Israel, the removal of its rule would follow automatically.

This is from Begin’s memoir, written years after the events. Evidence from the period, however, suggests that Begin wrote with the benefit of hindsight. His affiliation with the “maximalists,” expressed in the confrontation with Jabotinsky in 1938, remained as strong as ever. “Begin had known Avraham Stern in Warsaw and admired him,” Bishop writes. When he took over the leadership of the Irgun, “Begin was anxious to heal the old rift between the Irgun and Stern’s followers.”

Indeed, it was Begin, according to the Israeli scholar Joseph Heller, who did much to advance the revolutionary ideas of Ahimeir, Stern, and other “maximalists” within the Irgun. His pamphlets and declarations from the 1940s argued that bold displays of heroism and self-sacrifice would revitalize the nation’s dormant forces, from which “an army of liberation” would form to conduct “a national war of independence” against the British. But the Yishuv’s leadership denounced the terrorists and launched an antiterrorist campaign known as the “open season,” and the Irgun remained a small terrorist underground.

Still, whether he intended it or not, the Irgun’s actions under Begin had dramatic effect. Begin was a gifted orator with a knack for political theater. The plots and attacks he ordered provoked the British into taking harsh measures, aggravating resentment toward the Mandate and intensifying a sense of disorder. Britain’s control of Palestine received increasingly negative international attention, though mainly because it restricted the immigration of displaced Holocaust survivors. The casualties inflicted by the terrorists had a demoralizing effect on Mandate officials. Hoffman cites numerous statements of military and political officials, as well as mainstream British reporters, expressing doubts about whether the Mandate could be sustained in light of the Irgun’s terrorism. Determining its precise effect on British decision-making, however, is complicated by the fact that, as Hoffman notes, it was one factor among many:

An overwhelming concatenation of other developments—including Britain’s postwar economic travails, the granting of independence to India, the deterioration of relations with the United States over Palestine, the intense pressure of Jewish illegal immigration, the force of international and domestic opinion, the plight of the Holocaust’s survivors and Jewish displaced persons languishing in Europe, and the UNSCOP report

military battle for Palestine in 1949, they lost the diplomatic and economic struggle a decade earlier.

David Ben-Gurion realized that the indiscriminate terrorism of the Arab Revolt was “a tremendous defeat for Arab politics,” and the Zionist leadership adopted the strategy of “restraint.” The Revisionists saw this as weakness. Against restraint they advocated retaliation. They encouraged the “anonymous soldiers” of the Irgun forces to mount attacks, reminding them, with another line from Stern’s poem, that “only death can relieve of duty.” Hundreds of innocent Arabs were killed and many more injured by the Irgun in dozens of random shootings and bombings of Arab cafés, buses, and markets. As Hoffman comments, these attacks proved counterproductive, “driving hitherto moderate Arabs into the rebels’ arms.” The Irgun was denounced by Arabs, Britons, and Jews. Ben-Gurion called it a “Nazi party.”

Begin’s revolt in 1944 was based on the same faulty analysis. As Frederick Painton reported at the time:

The contention is that the Arabs by raising hell in 1936 cowed the British Government into producing the White Paper, so these Jews now hope the same tactics will cow the British into reinstating immigration.

But just as the indiscriminate attacks on Arabs did not cause them to be-

recommending the mandate's termination—all converged to push the Labour government toward this momentous climacteric.

Still, Hoffman seems to side with historians like Michael Cohen who put more weight on the Irgun's attacks, emphasizing specific operations like the bombing of the Mandate's central offices in the King David Hotel in July 1946, which killed ninety-one British, Arabs, and Jews, and the hanging of two British sergeants a year later. Others claim that the attacks "did indeed create a huge anti-government outcry in the British public, but the decision-making elite had already made up its mind." "The historiography of the period," Israeli historian Motti Golani wrote, "is generally united in the con-

clusion that it was neither Arab nor Jewish terrorism which brought British rule in Palestine to an end."

Partition, moreover, was promoted by senior British officials, including Churchill, irrespective of the Irgun's campaign. In view of the postwar financial and geopolitical circumstances that caused the British to abandon many territories around the globe, a cautious conclusion about Jewish terrorism seems justified: at most, it hastened the British abandonment of the Mandate. What seems clear is that terrorism is most effective in preventing diplomacy from resolving conflict.

The Irgun and Lehi were dismantled after the State of Israel was created, but their philosophy continues to be an active force in Israel. Begin became prime minister in 1977 and Shamir suc-

ceeded him in 1983. Their disciples and descendants occupied and still occupy central positions in Israeli public life. The militant nationalism and religious zeal of Ahimeir, Greenberg, Yair, and their followers continue to motivate Jewish extremists and to inspire Jewish terrorism. Challenging it is an intellectual and cultural battle no less than it is one of law enforcement.

The recent election of Benjamin Netanyahu—who after trailing in the polls made racist statements that were clearly intended to arouse fear—shows that the violent sentiments and views discussed by Hoffman and Bishop are still very much alive. Netanyahu's father, a formidable scholar of the Inquisition who died in 2012, was a revisionist ideologue who belonged to the "maximalist" circle. He was an Islamophobe

who supported pre-state terrorism and opposed any agreement with Arabs, even the peace accord with Egypt.

His son shares many of his views despite opportunistic rhetoric about a two-state solution, which he opposed during the election and then limply endorsed afterward. In early May he formed a new government including members of the Jewish Home party, which supports expansion of West Bank settlements and opposes a Palestinian state. The Likud, under Netanyahu's leadership, has shed the last remnants of Jabotinsky's liberal commitments and became a party willing to exploit racist contempt for Arabs. Understanding the ideological roots of Israel's current leaders is indispensable if they are ever to be successfully challenged and replaced. □

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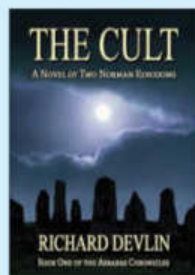
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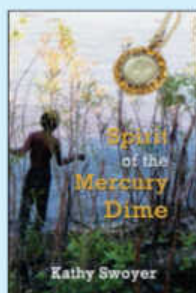


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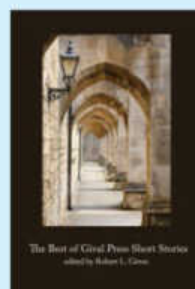
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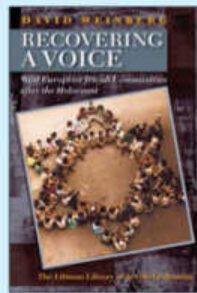
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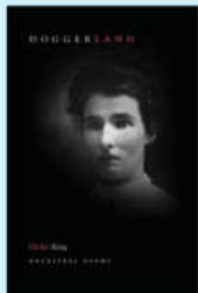
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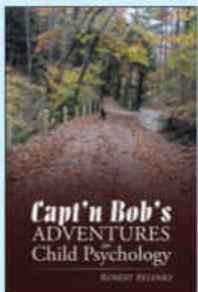
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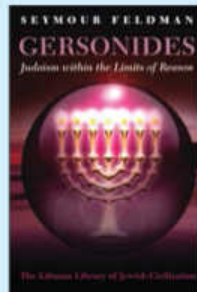
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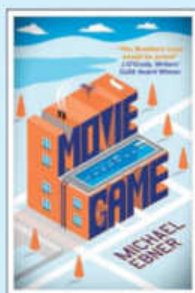
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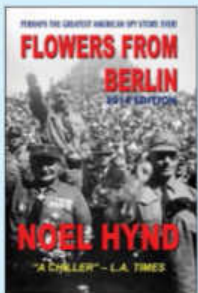
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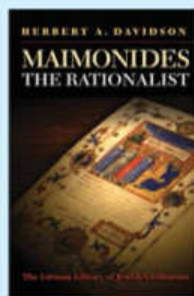
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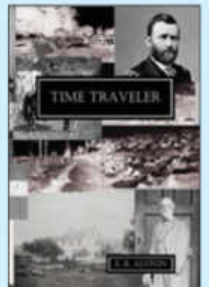


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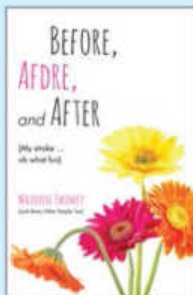
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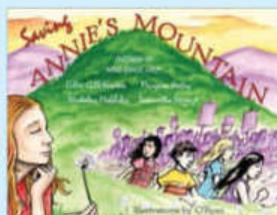
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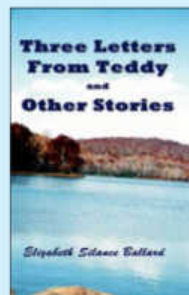
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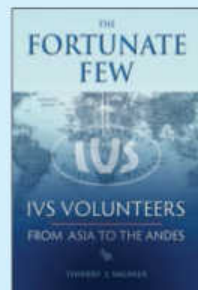
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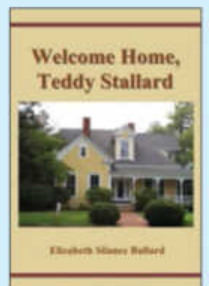


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The Bad Boy of Russian Poetry

Michael Scammell

Mayakovsky: A Biography

by Bengt Jangfeldt, translated from the Swedish by Harry D. Watson. University of Chicago Press, 610 pp., \$35.00

When Vladimir Mayakovsky committed suicide on April 14, 1930, the news sent shock waves through the Soviet Union. Ilya Ehrenburg, who knew of Mayakovsky's notorious gambling habit, thought he might have been playing Russian roulette with his beloved Mauser pistol and lost his bet. But Mayakovsky's suicide note, written two days before his death, suggested otherwise. Asking his mother and sisters to forgive him and sardonically asking for there to be no gossip ("the deceased hated gossip"), Mayakovsky had appended a few lines from an unfinished poem:

*The game, as they say,
Is over.
The love-boat has come to grief
On the reefs of convention.
Life and I are quits
And there's no point
In nursing grievances.**

The word "love-boat" suggested romantic reasons, but also created a mystery, for Mayakovsky's tangled love life was mostly unknown to the general public. At the time of his death he was simultaneously involved with three different women: his longtime mistress, Lili Brik, with whom he had spent most of his adult life in a bohemian ménage à trois (together with her husband, Osip Brik), but who was just then involved with a movie director; Tatyana Yakovleva, a striking young White Russian whom Mayakovsky had met in Paris and asked to marry him, but who had just married a Frenchman instead; and Veronika Polonskaya, a sultry young stage actress, also married, to whom he had also proposed marriage. Emotionally he was a wreck, and his death might have been precipitated by his relations with any one of his paramours.

But that wasn't the only mystery. In the tightly controlled Soviet Union, suicide was seen as a crime and an act of defiance, an assertion of personal freedom that contradicted the image of the state as a workers' paradise. Why would someone as famous and popular as Mayakovsky have killed himself, even under provocation? What most of his readers didn't know was that for the first time since the October Revolution, Mayakovsky was seriously disaffected. Stalin had started to purge his regime of "Trotskyists" and other perceived enemies, and two recent satirical plays of Mayakovsky, *The Bedbug* and *The Bathhouse*, had aroused official anger with their frank criticisms of government leaders and corrupt bureaucrats. His enemies whispered that he, too, was a secret Trotskyist and an elitist, out of touch with his proletarian base.

He was already being shadowed by the OGPU (the secret police), and its



Vladimir Mayakovsky with Scotty, a dog bought by Lili Brik in England, at the Briks' dacha in Pushkino, summer 1924

agents swarmed through his apartment the moment his death became known. They had long since penetrated Mayakovsky's inner circle. Osip Brik had been an agent of the secret police in the early 1920s and he and Lili still maintained close contact with them; and the official death notice was signed by no fewer than three secret agents, in addition to a couple of Mayakovsky's literary allies.

The OGPU's subsequent inquiries revealed that, despite government disapproval, Mayakovsky was still hugely popular with readers, and that a large part of the intelligentsia regarded his suicide as a political protest brought on by a crisis in Soviet literature. The suicide note, in the suspicious and paranoid atmosphere created by Stalin's regime, was seen as a cover for more serious issues. The authorities, however, were able to seize on the note for their own ends. "The early stages of the investigation," ran the official announcement in *Pravda*, "show that the suicide was motivated by purely personal considerations, quite unconnected to the poet's public and literary activities."

Mayakovsky had done the regime a favor with his reference to the "love-boat," and in 1935 he got a kind of reward. Lili Brik wrote to Stalin to

protest that Mayakovsky's work had been allowed to go out of print and was being forgotten, and she asked the first secretary to rectify the situation. Stalin responded with surprising warmth, given that he had probably never read a word by Mayakovsky. Mayakovsky, he announced, was "the best, most gifted poet of our Soviet epoch," adding, "indifference to his memory and his work is a crime." Within a week Moscow's Triumph Square was renamed Mayakovsky Square. A metro station was also named for him later, and a gigantic bronze statue erected in the square bearing his name. His political poems were reprinted in huge, multivolume editions and became staples of the Soviet literary curriculum.

Lili obviously thought she was helping her old lover by getting him rehabilitated and restoring his reputation with the government, but she was wrong. As Pasternak noted in his autobiography, after Stalin's canonization, Mayakovsky's work "began to be introduced forcibly, like potatoes under Catherine the Great. It was his second death. He had no hand in it."

The official endorsement ruined Mayakovsky's reputation for politically

sensitive Russian readers and hurt his reputation in the West, especially during the cold war. In today's Russia, since the disappearance of the Soviet Union, his works are virtually gone from high school curricula and are little read by the general public, while in the English-speaking world, he is also forgotten or ignored, especially when compared to the attention given his great contemporaries Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Osip Mandelstam. The first three undoubtedly regarded him as their equal, if not a better poet, and Mandelstam always treated him with respect, if not affection, yet a quarter-century after the demise of the Soviet Union, Mayakovsky remains under a cloud.

This injustice must have been very much on the mind of the Swedish scholar Bengt Jangfeldt when he embarked on his sumptuous new book, *Mayakovsky: A Biography*, which definitively rescues the poet from near oblivion and restores him to his central position in Russian literature during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Jangfeldt, the author and editor of several earlier books on Mayakovsky, seems to have read just about everything written by or about the poet and talked to everyone of interest who could be interviewed by him, not least the redoubtable Lili Brik, who died in 1978, chief friend, mistress, and impresario in Mayakovsky's life. This richly detailed and profusely illustrated biography, fluently translated by Harry D. Watson, is the best sort of literary monument to the poet and unlikely to be surpassed for many years to come.

Jangfeldt doesn't flinch from describing the provocative behavior of the assertive young punk who stormed into Moscow's prestigious Institute of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture at the age of eighteen, dressed all in black, with shaggy hair and a mouthful of rotten teeth. The future "raging bull" of Russian literature was a towering six feet two, with the build of a boxer and a booming voice to match, yet he was also soft and vulnerable. "The springboard of his boldness was a wild shyness, while beneath the appearances of a strong will there hid a phenomenal sensitivity prone to unjustified gloom, an absence of will," wrote Pasternak. Mayakovsky was a force of nature: headstrong, bellicose, an instinctive rebel and breaker of boundaries who in a sense never grew up. Till the end of his life he was a noisy adolescent in search of novelty and instant gratification, whether when falling in love with the next beautiful woman who crossed his path, gambling his last kopeck away at cards or billiards, or basking in the adulation of his audiences.

He was also extravagantly gifted—as painter, poet, performer, clown—and his promise was instantly spotted by David Burliuk, an older member of the Art Institute and himself exceedingly versatile. In 1911, Mayakovsky showed Burliuk two poems he had written, one a streetscape consisting entirely of visual images:

*A cross
iron horses*

*My translation. See the footnotes in the Web version of this review at www.nybooks.com for a comment on the translations of Mayakovsky.

*the first cubes leaped from the
windows
of runaway houses....
A magician
pulls steel rails
from the trolley's mouth.*

(Translated by Jack Hirschman
and Victor Ehrlich,
with adaptations)

Mayakovsky was building on the work of Alexander Blok and the Symbolists, but the dynamic of the line about cubes leaping from windows immediately struck Burliuk as visionary. Hailing the young hooligan as a genius, he enlisted him in his newly formed artistic group, the Cubo-Futurists. When the Futurists issued their notorious manifesto, *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, soon afterward, the young Mayakovsky's poems were included. The manifesto was very much to Mayakovsky's taste. "We alone are the face of our Time.... Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc., overboard from the Ship of Modernity," it announced. The Futurists' motto was "Cubism in pictorial art, Futurism in verbal art," and among the members were the "trans-sense" poets, Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchonykh, and avant-garde artists, such as Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin, and Alexander Rodchenko, who were pushing the boundaries of representation in painting.

Some of the Futurist poets went off on a wild reading tour of the provinces to draw attention to themselves. Mayakovsky wore a homemade yellow and black striped shirt for his performances and reveled in exchanging insults with audience members. His poems were highly rhetorical, with a heavy beat punctuated by extravagant rhymes. An approximation might be some of the work of the Beat poets of the 1950s (as in "Howl"), or hip-hop artists' emphasis on street language and rhyme, though there was no music, of course. A more serious affinity was with the New York School of poets of the 1960s, notably Frank O'Hara; yet some of Mayakovsky's simpler lyrics could sound like nursery rhymes, except for their gloomy content:

*Upon the roadway of my rutted
soul
the lunatics
with cruel heels
drum out their senseless words.
Where towns are hanged
and the crooked tips
of their towers
hover suspended
in a noose of clouds,
I walk alone
To weep for constables
crucified
on their cross-
roads.*

(My translation)

The Futurists' tour launched Mayakovsky and also started his love affair with the stage. It offered him a place to experiment with new forms and create a new persona for himself in an artificial environment. Embracing Burliuk's semi-ironic labeling of him as a "genius," he adopted the stance of "poet and prophet" and created a mythological autobiography for himself. His subsequent growth as a poet

and corresponding rise in avant-garde literary circles were meteoric; in 1913, still under twenty, he presented and starred in his verse tragedy, *Vladimir Mayakovsky*, at the Luna Park theater in St. Petersburg, with incidental music by Dmitri Shostakovich. The first act featured "a man missing an eye," "a man without a head," "a man with two cardboard kisses," and so on, and amounted to a fantastical call for revolution on behalf of the halt, the lame, and the sick:

*You wouldn't understand
why,
cold as an anonymous sneer,
I am carrying my soul to be
slaughtered
for the dinner of impending years.
Rolling like an unwanted tear
from the unshaven cheek of the
square,
I am probably the last poet.*

(Translated by
Maria Enzensberger)

The second act showed the poet in a toga after the revolution, accepting gifts from the poor for his saintly sacrifices and gathering their tears in a suitcase to take to "the dark god of storms" in the far north. The play featured several of Mayakovsky's distinctive themes, "madness, suicide, the struggle with God, man's existential exposure," in Jangfeldt's summing up, and his performance was met with hisses, catcalls, and almost wholly negative reviews.

Hisses and catcalls did not deter or upset Mayakovsky, however. Over the next few years, in addition to shorter works, he wrote a succession of long poems in his theatrical style: "A Cloud in Pants," "The Backbone-Flute," and "Man," as well as another play, *Mystery-Bouffe*, which was directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, with scenery and costumes by Malevich. Mayakovsky composed his poems aloud while walking, and he liked to read them himself, making a remarkable impression on his listeners. In "A Cloud," he both dramatized and satirized himself as a split personality—riotous hooligan on the outside, vulnerable lover and martyr underneath:

*No gray hairs streak my soul,
no grandfatherly fondness there!
I shake the world with the power
of my voice
and walk on—a handsome
twenty-two-year-old.*

(Translated by George Reavey,
with adaptations)

From that self-conscious opening the tension would build, comedy would turn to tragedy and back to comedy again, and he would burst into tears at tense moments in his recitation. Maxim Gorky attended one of the first readings of "A Cloud" and was so "frightened and moved" by Mayakovsky's sobs that he started to weep himself. Pasternak, another listener, commented that the narrator's self-sacrificial impulses and thirst for suffering reminded him of a Dostoevsky character.

"The Backbone-Flute" was a love poem dedicated to Lili Brik, to whom he had been introduced by Lili's sister, Elsa (later Elsa Triolet, the French

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novelist) in 1915, when he was twenty-two and Lili twenty-four. The daughter of a wealthy Jewish lawyer, a famous beauty and patron of the arts and famously promiscuous, Lili was married to the literary critic Osip Brik, but didn't let that get in her way. She was intelligent, strong-willed, adventurous, a feminist, using her pronounced physical attractions to make her way in the world. She believed in, and insisted upon, free love, and Osip, seeing advantages for himself, went along with the arrangement.

Jangfeldt introduces her in chapter two of his book, and she almost runs away with it, in part because she is such an arresting character herself. "I saw right away that Volodya was a poet of genius," Jangfeldt quotes her as saying in her unpublished autobiography,

but I didn't like him. I didn't like loud-mouthed people.... I didn't like the fact that he was so big that people turned to look at him in the street, I didn't like the fact that he listened to his own voice, I didn't even like his name—Mayakovsky—so noisy and so like a pseudonym, vulgar one at that.

Nevertheless, it was almost a foregone conclusion that Lili would have an affair with the brawny young poet. When told about it, Brik allegedly said, "How could you refuse anything to that man!" But this was more serious than her earlier liaisons. Mayakovsky was an enormously persistent and demanding (and jealous) lover, and this was reflected in "The Backbone-Flute," where the poet's alternation between euphoria and despair are now occasioned by his mistress:

*I am fated to be a tsar.
On the sunlit gold of my coins
I shall command my subjects
to mint
your precious face!
But where
the earth fades to tundra,
and the river bargains with the
north wind,
I'll scratch Lili's name on my
chains, and in the darkness of
hard labor
kiss them again and again.*

(Translated by Max Hayward
and George Reavey,
with adaptations)

Lili was happy to sleep with Mayakovsky, but held him at a certain length for nearly three years before suggesting he move in with herself and Osip, an arrangement that lasted on and off for the rest of his life. Meanwhile she lost no time in persuading her protégé to cut his hair and throw away his yellow blouse. She arranged for a dentist to make new teeth for him and bought him fancy new clothes to wear, so that he began to look more like an English dandy than the bohemian of old (though remaining just as wild in temperament).

"A Cloud in Pants" and "The Backbone-Flute" were both described as love poems. Mayakovsky's third major work, "Man," had no such description or dedication, but resembled the first two (and his play *Vladimir Mayakovsky*) in that it was essentially a tragedy in autobiographical form, featuring the poet as hero. This time, he boldly took

the life of Jesus as his model. The poem was split into sections: "Mayakovsky's Nativity," "Mayakovsky's Life," "Mayakovsky's Passion," "Mayakovsky's Ascension," and so on, and the poet was "the people's Christ," a secular martyr and prophet, battling evil (in the form of wealth, exploitation, inequality) on behalf of the poor and downtrodden.

The allegorical subject matter makes the poem sound pompous or boring, but the wealth of detail in Mayakovsky's story and the power of his imagery, not to speak of his outlandish yet utterly convincing rhymes, stunned his listeners. The room was full of notable poets who had just read their own work (the event was called "Two Generations of Poetry Meet"), and Mayakovsky's reading was the star performance. Pasternak called the poem "a work of uncommon profundity and exalted inspiration." Andrey Bely, the doyen of Symbolism, sat opposite Mayakovsky "as if transfixed," according to Jangfeldt. "When the reading was over, he rose, shaken and pale, and declared that he could not imagine how poetry of such power could be written at such a time." After a later reading, Bely again rose to his feet and declared Mayakovsky the most important Russian poet after the Symbolists. He had revolutionized Russian poetry both in form and subject matter, and no serious writer could ignore his influence after that.

Mayakovsky was working as a draftsman in Petrograd (as an alternative to being drafted into World War I) when the October Revolution broke out, and he had a ringside seat. It seemed to fulfill all his hopes, including the message of his recently produced drama, *Mystery-Bouffe*, a rowdy parody of the traditional mystery play portraying a struggle between two groups, the "Unclean" working class and the "Clean" upper class, that ends with the victory of the "Unclean" and the creation of a workers' paradise on earth. Mayakovsky and his fellow Futurists saw themselves as the natural allies of the revolutionaries. They had already imagined what the future society should look like; now the Bolsheviks would put that vision into effect.

Mayakovsky joined the government-sponsored writers' union, and spent two full years designing posters and writing propaganda for ROSTA—the Russian Telegraph Agency. He wrote political verses, children's poems, and commercial jingles for the new Soviet co-ops that replaced business. He also wrote and acted in three innovative movies with Lili Brik and imagined that he would become a star director and performer one day. According to Jangfeldt the films demonstrated originality and talent, and with friends like Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, Mayakovsky might have gone further, but in the end he opted for literature.

By sheer force of will Mayakovsky turned himself into the self-proclaimed poet laureate of the Revolution, though it was never a comfortable fit. In his *Ode to the Revolution*, *Left March*, and innumerable similar works he sang the praises of the Bolsheviks and urged them onward to victory, and in his long epic poem, *150,000,000* (the then population of the Soviet Union), celebrated the Red defeat of the Whites in Russia's Civil War. Lenin, however,

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

A CURRENT LISTING



John Armstrong, *ARA (British, 1893-1973), The Seer*

Shepherd/ W & K Galleries, 58 East 79th Street, New York, NY 10075; (212) 861-4050; shepherdny@aol.com; www.shepherdgallery.com. Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm. Three Centuries of British Art: An exhibition in association with Nicholas Bagshawe Fine Art (London), Guy Peppiatt Fine Art (London), and Moore-Gwyn Fine Art (London). September 29 through October 24, 2015. Highlights include an early J.M.W. Turner drawing of fishing boats, a double portrait of children by Joshua Reynolds's pupil Thomas Beach, a head study by Sir Thomas Lawrence, figure drawings by Richard Cosway, George Romney, Paul Sandby, and William Hoare of Bath, and landscapes by David Cox. Also included are a recently rediscovered watercolor of a Neapolitan market by John William Waterhouse, a John Singer Sargent late society portrait, and the Whistler-esque view from a ship by Joseph Severn. From the twentieth century are William Orpen's drawing of Sargent and a John Piper set design for a Benjamin Britten ballet. The exhibition is accessible on our website: www.shepherdgallery.com.



Gemla Leksakfabrik AB. Rocking Horse, 1900. Wood, horsehair, glass, leather, metal. © Roma Capitale - Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali - Collezione di giocattoli antichi, CGA LS 5242. Photographer: Bruce White

Bard Graduate Center Galleries, 18 West 86th Street, New York, NY 10024; (212) 501-3023; www.bgc.bard.edu/gallery; Tuesday-Sunday, 11am-5pm, Thursday to 8pm. On view through January 17: Swedish Wooden Toys, the first in-depth study of the history of wooden playthings in Sweden from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries. This colorful exhibition features remarkable doll houses, puzzles, games, pull toys, trains, planes, automobiles, and more. In the Focus Gallery through January 10: Revisions—Zen for Film explores Zen for Film (1962-1964), one of the most evocative films created by the Korean-American artist Nam June Paik (1932-2006).



Andrei Kushnir, Battery Kemble Park, 16" x 20" oil.

American Painting Fine Art, 5118 MacArthur Blvd., NW, Washington, D.C. 20016; (202) 244-3244; www.classicamericanpainting.com. Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-7pm, and by appointment. Through September, our exhibit "Wonderful Washington, DC," recent works by members of the Washington Society of Landscape Painters. Paintings in oil, acrylic, and watercolor, all framed. Also, paintings by Potomac River School artists Andrei Kushnir, Mary Kokoski, Barbara Nuss, and Brenda Kidera, and Garden Paintings by Michele Martin Taylor. We continue exhibiting recent works in watercolor by NYC artist David Baise: Images of Manhattan. Our gallery is dedicated to the finest work in landscape, still life, genre, urban, and marine art by current traditional American painters, many with national reputations.

Pen and Brush, www.penandbrush.com. We believe that art and literature are vital aspects of the human experience. We also believe that work created by women deserves to be recognized and valued on its merit—not judged by the gender of the maker. That's why it's our mission to advocate for gender parity by creating a platform for compelling and professional work by women artists. Join us this fall as we unveil our outstanding inaugural exhibit, selected by a group of independent curators who believe in helping women artists gain greater access and visibility in the marketplace. Pen and Brush: Until it's just about the art.



Arts District Center for the Arts, 740 E. 3rd St., Los Angeles, CA; (213) 814-7164; www.ladadspace.org; artsdistrictla@gmail.com. Opening in early 2016 at One Santa Fe, the Arts District Center for the Arts will serve the Arts District community and downtown Los Angeles with a gallery, screening room, and theater workshop space, creating opportunities for LA artists to connect with audiences and offering original, progressive programming that challenges the traditional boundaries of theater and the plastic arts. The ADCA—keeping it weird in LA!



John Davis Gallery, 362 1/2 Warren Street, Hudson, NY 12534; (518) 828-5907, art@johndavisgallery.com, www.johndavisgallery.com. Thursday-Monday, 11am-5pm. September 19 through October 11, 2015: Daisy Craddock, Four Decades, plein air oil pastel on paper. "Plein air drawing is more challenging these days, what with aging knees and the ubiquitous Lyme tick, but though I've tried referencing photos, what really interests me is a response to being there and to being in the moment."—Daisy Craddock.



Daisy Craddock, Birch (East Barnard), 1984, oil pastel/paper, 27 x 22 inches



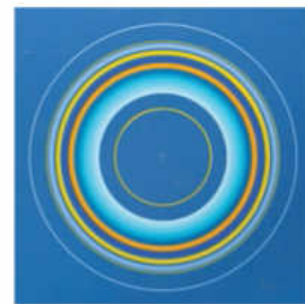
From Willkommen, pastel over etching, 9 x 18 inches, 2015

GALLERY 71, 974 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10021; (212) 744-7779; www.gallery71.com. Gallery hours Monday-Friday, 10am-6pm, Saturday 10am-5pm. Recent work by JAMES STEWART September 24 through October 15. Opening September 24, 5-8pm. The exhibition includes four large oil-on-canvas paintings (50 x 50 inches), which triggered the smaller works in the exhibition. Stewart has created a body of work using snippets or details from the larger works, the body of work includes paintings on a more intimate scale, etchings, drawings, and pastels over etchings. Stewart is a 2007 Guggenheim recipient and has exhibited for many years in New York and Philadelphia. www.stewartpainter.com.



Jacob Lawrence, Dancing at the Savoy, 1943, gouache on paper, 14 x 21 inches

Alexandre Gallery has moved to a new space at 724 Fifth Avenue, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10019; (212) 755-2828; inquiries@alexandregallery.com, www.alexandregallery.com. Tuesday-Friday, 10am-5:30pm and Saturday 11am-5pm. RE-OPENING GROUP EXHIBITION: September 15 through October 31, 2015. Among the contemporary artists featured will be Gregory Amenoff, Will Barnet, Brett Bigbee, James Cambronne, Lois Dodd, Anne Harris, Emily Nelligan, Tom Uttech, John Walker and Neil Welliver. Early 20th-century artists will include Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, John Marin, Elie Nadelman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Horace Pippin, and others.



ANTONIO ASIS. Cercles concentriques (1131), 1974, gouache on paperboard, 8 7/8 x 8 7/8 inches, signed and dated lower right

The Drawing Room, 66 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937; (631) 324-5016, www.drawingroom-gallery.com. Monday, Friday, and Saturday, 10am-5pm; Sunday, 11am-5pm. ANTONIO ASIS and COSTANTINO NIVOLA (1911-1988): Early Concretes. September 12 through October 26, 2015. The works of two acclaimed artists are explored in concurrent exhibitions featuring gouaches on paperboard by the Argentine artist ANTONIO ASIS and selected rare concretes by COSTANTINO NIVOLA, born in Sardinia. Living in Paris since 1956, Asis was integral to the development of kinetic and optical art. His focus on geometric abstraction and dynamic

motion has culminated in these brilliant compositions of concentric circles and vibrating colors. Costantino Nivola was immersed throughout his life in the nature of sculptural form, integrating architecture, abstraction, and figuration in varied mediums ranging from bronze to concrete. Of the latter, Nivola pioneered a technique in carving green cement, generating some of Modernism's most revered archetypal forms in varying scales, from pedestal-sized to the monumental.

Taos Center for The Arts, 133 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, Taos, NM 87571; (575) 758-2052, deborah@tcataos.org, www.tcataos.org, www.pressingthroughtime.com. Monday-Friday, 10am-5pm. Pressing Through Time—150 Years of Printmaking in Taos is a multiveneue set of exhibitions devoted to prints and printmaking in Taos. This event marks the first comprehensive overview of printmaking in Taos Valley with exhibits featuring work from the earliest known images of the region through contemporary prints. The exhibitions are spread across fifteen museums, arts organizations, and galleries in Taos during the months of September 2015 through January 2016. A symposium is scheduled for October 17 and 18 in the Arthur Bell Auditorium at Harwood Museum of Art. See www.pressingthroughtime.com for more information.



Barbara Latham, A Taos Street Scene, woodcut, circa 1935

Chappel Galleries, Colchester Road, Chappel, Essex CO6 2DE, UK; Tel: 01206 240326; info@chappellgalleries.co.uk, www.chappellgalleries.co.uk. Open Saturday and Sunday 10am-5pm or by appointment. All works for sale. Permanent holding of Resident Prize-winning English artist Wladyslaw Mirecki: English scenes in watercolor including large works. Andrew Lambirth, author, as panelist wrote on the occasion of Mirecki winning first prize in the Lynn Painter-Stainers Prize, London 2015: "...Mirecki is a master of watercolour who derives much of the vitality of his imagery from a sure and subtle juxtaposition of man-made architecture and natural growth ... an artist at the height of his powers." Exhibited: London, England, China, France.



Viaduct with Tank Traps, watercolor, 2014, 138 x 138 cm. 1st prize winner Lynn Painter-Stainers Prize 2015

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

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Celebration of the Life and Work of poet Philip Levine

The Great Hall 6:30pm

SEPTEMBER 29

Thrive: How Better Mental Health Care Transforms Lives and Saves Money

Authors, David M. Clark, Professor of Psychology at Oxford and Richard Layard, leading labor economist with Paul Krugman

The Great Hall 6:30pm

SEPTEMBER 30

The Law of the Land: A Grand Tour of Our Constitutional Republic

Author Ahkil Reed Amar

The Great Hall 6:30pm

OCTOBER 16

Between Debt and the Devil: Money, Credit and Fixing Global Finance

Author Adair Turner, with Martin Wolf

The Rose Auditorium 6:30pm

OCTOBER 26

Pope Francis and the Environment

with the Poetry Society of America

The Great Hall 6:30pm

NOVEMBER 2

St. Marks Is Dead: The Many Lives of America's Hippest Street

Author Ada Calhoun will on the history of St. Marks Place with live music

The Great Hall 6pm

NOVEMBER 6

Atmosphere of Hope: Searching for Solutions to the Climate Crisis

Tim Flannery

The Rose Auditorium 6:30pm

NOVEMBER 12

Bicentennial of Elizabeth Cady Stanton

The Great Hall 6:30pm

NOVEMBER 16

The Invisible History of the Human Race: How DNA and History Shape Our Identities and Our Futures

Author Christine Kenneally

The Great Hall 6:30pm

DECEMBER 18

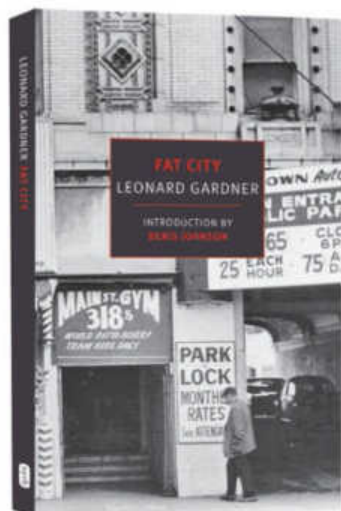
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Leonard Gardner will be

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Monday, November 2nd, 7pm

Brookline Booksmith

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Friday, November 20th

Film Forum

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Q&A after the 7pm showing

of the restored film

A vivid novel of defiance and struggle

Stockton, California, is the setting: the Lido Gym, the Hotel Coma, Main Street's lunchrooms and dark bars offer a temporary respite to the men and women whose backbreaking work in the fields barely allows them to make a living. When two men meet in the gym—the ex-boxer Billy Tully and the novice Ernie Munger—their brief sparring session sets into motion their hidden fates, initiating young Munger into the “company of men” and luring Tully back into training. *Fat City* tells of their anxieties and hopes, their loves and losses, and the stubborn determination of their manager, Ruben Luna, who knows that even the most promising kid is likely to fall prey to some weakness. Then again, “There was always someone who wanted to fight.”

Fat City, with a screenplay by Leonard Gardner, was made into a 1972 film, starring Stacy Keach and Jeff Bridges, and directed by John Huston. A Sony Pictures 4K restoration of *Fat City* will show in select theaters in fall 2015.

“Gardner has got it exactly right. . . but he has done more than just get it down, he has made it a metaphor for the joyless in heart.”

—Joan Didion

“Set in the bars, buses, gyms, and transit hotels of gritty, fifties’ era Stockton, California, *Fat City* is a perfect document, mapped and studied, the dialogue memorized, by generations of writers. The well-known film (written by Gardner for John Huston), only approaches the spare timelessness of Gardner’s prose.” —Jayne Anne Phillips

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was not impressed. The poem was “nonsense, stupidity, double-dyed stupidity and pretentiousness!” he told his colleagues, and said that the commissar for enlightenment (and Mayakovsky’s friend), Anatoly Lunacharsky, should be “horsewhipped” for allowing it to be printed. After a revival of *Mystery-Bouffe* to celebrate the second anniversary of the Revolution, the play was panned by critics, and *Pravda* published a mocking headline, “Enough of This Mayakovskery.” Not long afterward, a decree was issued denouncing Futurism as “absurd” and “perverse.”

Mayakovsky ignored these difficulties, and in 1924 celebrated the man who had excoriated him in a long epic, *Lenin*, a Marxist history of the world up till Lenin’s time. A third patriotic epic, *Good*, published in 1927, was another encomium to the Soviet state to mark the tenth anniversary of the Revolution. By now he had overcome his critics and had the satisfaction of seeing his pro-Soviet poems published in millions of copies. Luckily there were a few exceptions to his political work, such as “An Extraordinary Adventure that Befell Vladimir Mayakovsky in His Dacha,” a delightful account of the sun coming down from the heavens to talk to him, and two more love poems to Lili, one long one, *About That*, and one short—“I Love,” written in 1923 after Lili made her first determined attempt to put an end to their affair:

*You came
glancing
matterofactly
above the roar despite
the height
saw a boy simply
promptly
took his heart
went to
play with it
like a rubberball.
All the others,
the screwed-up girls,
thought it
miraculous.
“Love that guy?
Hell, he’ll swallow her up.
She must be some tamer from
The circus or zoo.”*

(Translated by Jack Hirschman
and Victor Ehrlich,
with adaptations)

Thanks to his popularity, Mayakovsky now led a life of comparative ease and was given more latitude than most other writers. He had become a cultural ambassador for the new state, traveling to Paris, Berlin, and other cities in Western Europe, and in 1925 crossed the Atlantic to America for his first and only visit. He marveled at the “austere disposition of bolts and steel” in a poem on the Brooklyn Bridge and welcomed “the futurism of naked technology,” as he put it in his subsequent book, *My Discovery of America*. But he claimed to be frightened by the sight of technology out of control and trotted out the usual Soviet clichés about American loneliness and the heartlessness of capitalism. The lonely poet had a lightning affair with an intelligent and attractive young Russian emigrée, Yelizaveta (“Elly”) Jones, who acted as his informal interpreter in New York. Nine months later she bore him a daughter, Helen Patricia, whom he was able to

meet just once when Elly brought her to Nice a couple of years later.

Returning to Moscow, Mayakovsky touched rock bottom with such poems as “Going Home,” a paean to the dictatorship of the proletariat with a request that Stalin “command” the “poet’s work,” and some months later, “To Sergei Esenin” (the only poet to rival Mayakovsky for popularity in the early 1920s), accusing the peasant poet of pessimism and political incorrectness for taking his own life. Mayakovsky was becoming a “newspaper poet,” as he himself acknowledged, suppressing true emotion for the sake of fake emotion and propaganda, and his personal life was collapsing as well. It was after visiting Elly and their baby daughter in Nice and contemplating the havoc he had caused that Mayakovsky embarked on his furious love affair with Tatyana Yakovleva in Paris. When she rejected his proposal, he promised to return and try again in October, but the government refused him a visa for the first time ever. Soon after, with encouragement from a jealous Lili, he launched into his affair with Veronika Polonskaya.

Mayakovsky was beset on all fronts. Defeated in love, he was forced to confront the price of his unqualified support for the Revolution too. In one of his poems, “Letter from Paris to Comrade Kostrov on the Nature of Love,” Mayakovsky dramatized the conflict between politics and personal emotion that he had experienced for most of his life. In another poem, “At the Top of My Voice,” inspired by Pushkin’s epitaph for himself, *Exegi Monumentum*, written just under a hundred years earlier, he admitted how much violence he had done to his work:

*Propaganda
sticks in
my throat too,
I’d rather
scribble
you love poems—
it’s more
profitable,
has more charm.
But I
straitjacketed
myself,
stomped
on the throat
of my own song.*

(My translation)

“I...stomped on the throat of my own song” was Mayakovsky’s epitaph for himself, and Jangfeldt devotes several chapters to his last agonizing months, tracking the events of his last fateful week day by day, until the poet concluded there was no other way to resolve both his emotional and his political dilemmas. Jangfeldt marshals the huge variety of sources he has amassed to create a gripping account of the poet’s tumultuous life and tragic death. Inexplicably for a book published by an academic press, however, there is no bibliography, just a list of the main sources, chapter by chapter, and while there is an index of names, there is neither an index of topics nor of the Mayakovsky poems discussed by Jangfeldt. A further problem is the translations, but in all other respects, this book restores Mayakovsky to his rightful place in the pantheon of Russian letters and does him full justice. □

Murder in Mexico: An Open Letter

To Enrique Peña Nieto,
President of Mexico:

We the undersigned, as journalists, writers, creative artists, and advocates of free expression from around the world, and with the support of PEN and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), would like to express our indignation regarding the deadly attacks against reporters in your country. An attempt on the life of a journalist is an attack on society's very right to be informed.

On July 30, the news photographer Rubén Espinosa was killed in an apartment in Mexico City along with four other

their homes, and their families and fled to Mexico City after receiving threats. Espinosa was murdered shortly after his arrival in Mexico City. Mr. President, there must be no more murders: his death, and the deaths of Alejandra Negrete, Yesenia Quiroz, Nadia Vera, and Mile Virginia Martín, who were killed with him, must be prosecuted and the perpetrators brought to justice. In your country, the statistics are disastrous regarding impunity in crimes against the press: according to the Mexican Human Rights Commission, 89 percent of the murders remain unsolved. The commission has said that its own investigations are frequently obstructed by national au-



Mexican photojournalists with a picture of their murdered colleague, Rubén Espinosa, at a demonstration in Mexico City, August 2015

people—a young woman activist, her two roommates, and a domestic worker. This is only the latest in a long series of outrages against the press, and it took place in a city that was considered one of the last safe places in the country for reporters to work. There would now seem to be no safe haven for the profession.*

Since 2000, dozens of journalists have been killed in Mexico, and approximately twenty more are still disappeared. The great majority of these crimes have never been prosecuted. According to the Mexican Human Rights Commission, there is evidence that points to the involvement of government officials in many of the attacks against journalists and media outlets. The widespread and extreme physical threats faced by reporters in Mexico have drawn the attention of many concerned with international freedom of expression and press freedom, including such groups as PEN and the CPJ, which have campaigned to end censorship by the bullet.

Rubén Espinosa, who was thirty-one years old, worked as a photographer in the state of Veracruz. A few weeks ago, he fled to Mexico City after receiving the last of what he considered severe threats to his life. Reporters in Veracruz who receive threats are often convinced that they come directly from the local government. Since the current governor of Veracruz took power in 2010, journalists have been harassed, threatened, and killed in unprecedented numbers: fourteen have been murdered in atrocious fashion, and three have disappeared in the same time period. In each of these cases officials have dismissed the victim's profession as the probable cause.

So far, thirty-seven of Rubén Espinosa's colleagues in Veracruz have left their jobs,

thorities. Judicial negligence guarantees impunity.

Today, journalists in many parts of the world are under attack, and Mexican reporters in particular are in deadly peril. Organized crime, corrupt government officials, and a justice system incapable of prosecuting criminals all contribute to reporters' extreme vulnerability.

Mr. President, we urge you:

1. To guarantee the immediate and effective investigation of the assassination of Rubén Espinosa and of the shameful number of journalists in Mexico who have met the same fate, and the thorough investigation of state and municipal officials who, in each case, may have been involved.

2. To undertake an immediate review of the procedures established to protect reporters' lives, and to make a swift and effective commitment to guarantee and protect freedom of expression in Mexico.

Signed,

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Christiane Amanpour, Jon Lee Anderson, Laurie Anderson, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Margaret Atwood, Paul Auster, Louis Begley, J.M. Coetzee, Teju Cole, Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro, Junot Díaz, Louise Erdrich, Jules Feiffer, Francisco Goldman, Pete Hamill, Ha Jin, Colum McCann, Larissa MacFarquhar, Sonia Nazario, Francine Prose, David Remnick, Alan Riding, Alan Rusbridger, Andrew Solomon, Art Spiegelman, Colm Tóibín, and Tobias Wolff

(Partial listing of more than 600 signees. See www.pen.org for full list.)

*Editors' Note: For more on Espinosa's killing, see Alma Guillermoprieto, "Mexico: The War on Journalists," *NYRDaily*, August 19, 2015.)



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Princeton University is pleased to announce the call for applications to the **Fung Global Fellows Program at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS)**. Each year the program selects six scholars from around the world to be in residence at Princeton for an academic year and to engage in research and discussion around a common theme. Fellowships are awarded to scholars employed outside the United States who are expected to return to their positions, and who have demonstrated outstanding scholarly achievement and exhibit unusual intellectual promise but who are still early in their careers.

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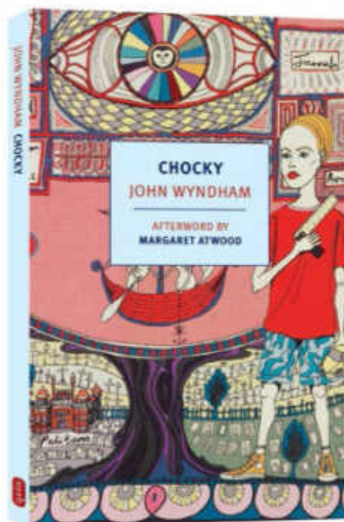
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John Wyndham

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LETTERS

THE STEM FRENZY

To the Editors:

In reviewing Amanda Ripley's book *The Smartest Kids in the World and How They Got That Way*, Andrew Hacker [NYR, July 9] notes that American fifteen-year-olds did much less well on the 2012 PISA assessment of mathematics proficiency than those in many other countries, including Finland (ranked eighth). He observes that "schools and teachers get most of the blame." The PISA results and other international test data are often used to attack unionization and tenure, and to support the charter school movement and other privatization schemes like vouchers.

Finland has a population of 5.4 million, 84 percent of whom live in urban areas. In this it is not so different from Massachusetts (6.7 million, 92 percent urban). As it happens, Massachusetts is one of three US states that elected to participate in PISA as an individual education system. (In order to obtain reliable state-level data, a larger sample must be tested than for national results.) The Massachusetts mean score in mathematics—from public school students only—is statistically not significantly different from that of Finland: 514 versus 519. Last September, *Forbes* published an article titled "If Massachusetts Were a Country, Its Students Would Rank 9th in the World."

The PISA test is scaled so that the mean score among all test-takers is 500; the mean US score is 481. Florida also chose to administer the PISA test; its mean math score was 467, which would put it around thirty-seventh in the world. Data from other tests suggest that if every state administered the PISA, several northeastern and mid-Atlantic states would likely place in the top ranks, while several states of the deep South would place well below the world average.

These results imply that the national PISA results quoted by Mr. Hacker disguise a sectional problem. One might suspect that the low US scores are perhaps the result of racial and income inequality, a low-tax, small-government philosophy, and a regional culture that does not value public education. And perhaps the examples of Massachusetts and other high-achieving states like New Jersey and Maryland are more relevant to the American experience than that of Finland.

Joseph L. Ruby
Silver Spring, Maryland

To the Editors:

Laudably, Andrew Hacker's article "The Frenzy for STEM Talent" [NYR, July 9] spreads the word that claims of STEM shortages have been debunked in Michael Teitelbaum's book *Falling Behind?: Boom, Bust, and the Global Race for Scientific Talent*. Unfortunately, it includes some inaccurate statements.

Hacker states that a very large proportion of undergraduate mathematics classes are not taught by full-time professors and that this is a finding of a survey conducted by the American Mathematical Society. The American Mathematical Society does not conduct such surveys. However, the Conference Board of the Mathematical Sciences does. Its 2010 survey found that 47 percent of course sections are taught by tenured, tenure-eligible, or permanent faculty. If high-school-level courses are excluded, this percentage rises. Unfortunately, a large proportion of undergraduates do take high-school-level mathematics courses. (See Tables S.2, S.4, and S.5 of *Statistical Abstract of Undergraduate Programs in the Mathematical Sciences in the United States: Fall 2010 CBMS Survey*.)

Despite the weak mathematical preparation of many undergraduates, the situation for STEM majors is less disturbing than readers of Hacker's account might think. This account does not mention the number of students who enter STEM majors after the first year of college. Instead, it reports on those who leave: "By graduation, the number of students who start in STEM fields falls by a third." This may have been intended as a rephrasing of page 184 of Teitelbaum's *Falling Behind?* However, it does not say that these students graduated, only that they changed majors. The same page—in fact, the same paragraph—reports that the number of students who enter STEM majors after their first year of college is larger than the number of students who leave those majors after their first year. The outflow from STEM to other majors is substantial, but it is exceeded by the inflow of students from other majors to STEM. Moreover, another analysis found a small net increase in STEM majors between college entrance and graduation.

Falling Behind? notes that this "resorting" of undergraduates and majors does not occur in most other countries and discusses Hal Saltzman's idea that "loose coupling between S&E [science and engineering] disciplines and S&E careers" may provide the US "some of its dynamism, innovativeness, and creativity." Similarly, Anthony Carnevale and his colleagues write of the "diversion" of STEM-capable workers into non-STEM careers during or after college. They consider this to be a result of "increasing value of the competencies—the set of core cognitive knowledge, skills, and abilities—that are associated with STEM occupations, and the noncognitive work interests and work values associated with STEM occupations." This increasing value is measured in dollars: "No matter what their occupation, STEM majors make substantially more over their lifetimes than non-STEM majors." Hacker seems to have a different opinion, he interprets "holding jobs that didn't require a BA" as "holding jobs that did not need their training."

My experience leads me to agree with Carnevale et al. Although my Ph.D. is in mathematics, aside from a few visiting professorships, I have not held a post in what the Bureau of Labor Statistics might consider a STEM occupation for over twenty-five years. However, I think that my STEM competencies and values have served me well in my work as a mathematics education consultant. Among other things, they help me to be a careful reader of statistics.

My experience also leads me to agree with Teitelbaum that there are symptoms of malaise in STEM, such as unattractive career paths for Ph.D.s in biomedical sciences. This problem affects us all and I hope that a future issue of *The New York Review of Books* will discuss it.

Cathy Kessel
Berkeley, California

Andrew Hacker replies:

I have no problem with Joseph Ruby's figures. He cites another crucial fact: our nation contains a lot of states like Florida. They not only impact our total PISA score, but raise our infant mortality and incarceration rates. If *Forbes* wants to view Massachusetts as a separate country, shouldn't it do the same with Florida?

Michael Teitelbaum makes a convincing case that attrition in STEM fields is due largely to indifferent teaching. Cathy Kessel prefers to blame the "weak mathematical preparation" of students. But when 45 percent of engineering majors fail to finish, as the American Society for Engineering Education admits, mightn't instruction deserve a second look? Nor does she cite another table in the report released by the American Mathematical Society, which shows that at our top universities, only 10.1 percent of introductory mathematics classes are taught by instructors with professorial status.

LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

To the Editors:

In his review of the river paintings of George Caleb Bingham, now on exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art [NYR, June 25], Sanford Schwartz finds that the individuality of the pictures is owing to a contradiction between “his quest to create scenes of a classical poise . . . and his doing so with such unlikely material.”

“Unlikely material” is Mr. Schwartz’s judgment not of Bingham’s paintings but of their human subjects. What he means by this is not apparent until fairly late in his review, when he says that “Bingham certainly sanitized his subjects.” And now I am sorry to have to quote Mr. Schwartz at some length:

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



George Caleb Bingham: The Jolly Flatboatmen, 1846

His raftsmen rarely do anything more demanding than push their flatboats off into the river with a pole or dance a jig. He gives them the physical bearing and leisurely composure of gods, or, at least, sportsmen. In actuality, the flatboatmen were nautical versions of gas station attendants. On their rafts they carried cords of wood . . . to meet the passing steamboats . . . and supply them with fuel. They were known to be a rowdy, surly, and unkempt bunch.

A number of things are wrong here.

Like his apparent mentor, the Metropolitan’s caption-writer, Mr. Schwartz uses *raftsmen* and *flatboats* interchangeably as synonyms, and assumes that either a flatboat or a raft could be used to carry firewood to steamboats. A flatboat was used for transporting freight and could carry many tons, but downstream only. A raft was made of logs—or in Bingham’s paintings, squared timbers—to be transported, of course, only downstream. Both were equipped with long, heavy oars for steering, but they could not be rowed. Neither a flatboat nor a raft could have been used to supply firewood to a steamboat. Navigation of either a flatboat or a raft required great strength, skill, and knowledge—also courage, for the work was dangerous. The people who sold firewood to steamboats had first to cut the wood. And so there is no likeness whatever between Bingham’s river boatmen and gas station attendants.

There is, in fact, a lot of testimony to the rowdiness (I suppose also to the surliness and unkemptness) of some of the independent boatmen of the Mississippi drainage in Bingham’s time and earlier, and to the terrible “rough and tumble” fighting on the part of some of them. It is also imaginable and reasonably supposable that some of those boatmen were physically comely and wore eye-gladdening clothes, just as it is imaginable and reasonably supposable that some people of wealth and high culture might be rowdy, surly, and unkempt.

Wendell Berry
Port Royal, Kentucky

Sanford Schwartz replies:

I am thankful to Wendell Berry for noting the difference between rafts and flatboats. If neither carried wood, however, some vessel certainly did. Writers on Bingham make clear that servicing steamboats with wood, or fuel, was one of the jobs these men maintained. The stacks of cut wood can be seen in Bingham’s pictures. As for there being “no likeness whatever between Bingham’s river boatmen and gas station attendants,” I agree. That was my point. The artist’s concern was firstly with a classical, highly ordered sense of space, light, bodily bearing, and structure. He was not a realist. For his purposes the “courage,” “skill,” and “knowledge” of the rivermen were of secondary importance, as was a

true account of their appearance and manner. Much of the continuing strength of Bingham’s art comes from the disjunction, which we sense intuitively, between what life on the river must actually have been and the immaculate classical tableaux he made of it.

CORRECTIONS

In William Dalrymple’s “The Great and Beautiful Lost Kingdoms” [NYR, May 21], the temple discussed on page 12, of which a tower is shown on the previous page, is the Bayon temple at Angkor Thom, not the Ta Prohm temple.

In Joyce Carol Oates’s “Inspiration and Obsession in Life and Literature” [NYR, August 13], Henry James’s *Portrait of a Lady* was published in 1881, a decade after George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*.

In Christopher R. Browning’s “When Europe Failed” [NYR, August 13], the caption for the photograph on page 66 should have referred to a ceremony marking a gift of guns from Hitler to the Yugoslav regime.

David Cole’s “The New America: Little Terror, Big Fear” [NYR, August 13] referred to the “wall separating Israel from the West Bank.” In fact, Israel has constructed most of the wall within the West Bank, and has included on the Israeli side significant parts of the West Bank.

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365 Fifth Ave., Rm C197, New York, NY

Sunday, October 11th, 12pm

Politics & Prose, Washington, DC

Monday, October 12th, 7pm

The Strand Bookstore, New York, NY

Tuesday, October 13th, 7pm

East Meadow Public Library

East Meadow, NY

Wednesday, October 14th, 7pm

Book Culture on Columbus, New York, NY

Thursday, October 15th, 7pm

Porter Square Books, Cambridge, MA

“This is a fierce and beautiful book. It burns with a passion for ideas, the value of history, the need for argument. As a memoir of a grandfather it is sui generis. I loved it.”

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Journalist Sasha Abramsky re-creates a lost world, bringing to life the people, the books, and the ideas that filled his grandparents’ house, from gatherings that included Eric Hobsbawm and Isaiah Berlin to books with Marx’s handwritten notes, William Morris manuscripts and woodcuts, an early sixteenth-century Bomberg Bible, and a first edition of Descartes’s *Meditations*. The book is a wondrous journey through our times, from the vanished worlds of Eastern European Jewry to the cacophonous politics of modernity.

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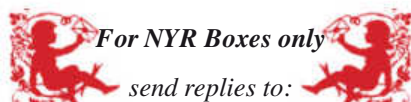
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